



T H E
M A S Q U E R A D E.

V O L. II.



RECEIVED

THE

MASSACHUSETTS

OF

RECEIVED

M A

H

L

M I

In

Printed

THE
MASQUERADE;
OR, THE
HISTORY
OF
LORD AVON
AND
MISS TAMEWORTH.
IN A SERIES OF LETTERS.

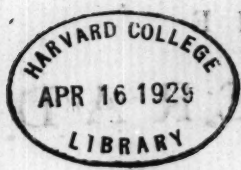
V O L. II.

L O N D O N,

Printed for ROBINSON and ROBERTS, at No. 25, in
Pater-Noster-Row.

MDCCLXIX.

W438.59.23



Greenough fund

HISTORY

LORD AVON

JAMES NORTH

in a series of letters

VOLUME

LONDON

Printed at the University Press, Cambridge.
By the University Press, Cambridge.
MCMXXIX.

THE
MASQUERADE.

LETTER XXIX.

Mr. MOUNTNEY to Colonel ACKWORTH.

YOU desire so earnestly to hear how Avon and his Eudocia go on, that I proceed to inform you—My lord is perfectly recovered from his illness: but as to his jealousy, it will not, I am inclined to imagine, be totally eradicated; because his love is, I think, increased—The concern which she discovered at his illness, and her readiness to pardon him,

2 THE MASQUERADE.

at a time when he knew he was the aggressor, have operated so powerfully on him, that he is half wild with rapture.

The picture which occasioned all this confusion was, it seems, drawn of the size of that which Sedley gave to Olivia, and set in the same manner, by order of lady Avon; who, having long had a fancy to have my lord's portrait, in the dress in which she first saw him, and thinking Sedley's picture a striking likeness, went privately with Olivia to the painter, and desired him to copy my lord's face from her bracelet; (as he had refused to gratify her request, because he deemed it an idle one) and to dress him in the manner she described.—It was just come home that evening when he caught her admiring it—He took it for Sedley's; and from that mistake arose the quarrel between them, which was attended with such unhappy consequences.

Olivia, who before always took my lord's part, has owned to me that she
thought

THE MASQUERADE. 3

thought him quite wrong: blaming, however, my lady for leaving him; and saying every thing she could think of, to persuade her to stay in town, but to no purpose.—

By what I can see, my lady will be very glad to come to Grosvenor-Square; tho' my lord enjoys so much of her company, with so little interruption, that he will be very loth to give up his tranquillity for crowds and noise.

A man may really live here very agreeably: the country is, at present, charming: what must it then be in the height of summer?

Mr. Heber, the only near neighbour—(farmers excepted) is much of the gentleman, and is a true lover of the old English hospitality. His eldest daughter, Alicia, is a fine young woman, tho' some years older than lady Avon or than Olivia, and a very different character; being neither so meek as her sister, nor so spirited as Eudocia: she is sensible, good-natured,

4 THE MASQUERADE.

and truly polite, according to my ideas of politeness; for she always endeavours to make herself agreeable to those with whom she converses, and to make them pleased with themselves. I honestly declare that I could spend my days with these worthy creatures: that is, if Olivia was disposed to bestow her heart upon me.—But the possession of her heart is a happiness I dare not expect, tho' she is much more free and easy in her behaviour to me than when we were in town. I might, I believe, be, in time, blessed with her friendship; but the devil take your platonics, I will have nothing to do with them.

Avon has so little platonism, even in appearance, that Eudocia chides him severely sometimes. I could not help smiling at them yesterday.—We were walking in the garden; she asked him if they should set out for London next morning.

“What?”

THE MASQUERADE. 5

“What? tired of Derbyshire already, my love? How happily could I spend all my days here with your charming company!—But you shall be indulged in every respect; only give me one more kiss, and we will go to-morrow.”

“Pshaw — You are never satisfied,” cried she—smiling on me with such an excessive archness, “even Mr. Mountney laughs at you.”—

“Laugh at me, madam,” replied he, warmly; “may not a man kiss his wife without being laughed at? Whenever Mountney marries, he may take the same liberty before me at any time.—Friendship is nothing, if the pleasures resulting from it are not freely enjoyed.”—

“Thankee, my lord,” said I, seizing Olivia—“If this young lady would but consent to look upon me, in the light in which you are viewed by lady Avon, you should not outdo me in love, I promise you.”

6 THE MASQUERADE.

Olivia blushed and broke from me, but said nothing.

Eudocia cried, "See there, my lord, the force of example! You have, by your behaviour, authorized your friend to be impertinent, and put us both out of countenance."

"Nay now, my lord," said I, "I am quite of your side of the question; e'en say what you please to her, and do what you please with her."

This revived his good-humour: he seized Eudocia, while I ran after Olivia, and had but just caught her, when the lively lady Avon flew hastily from the arms of her husband to save her friend from mine. A romping-bout with two such fine creatures, few men could have resisted; and I swear there was so much brightness mixed with sensibility in Eudocia's eyes, when she laid hold of my shoulder, in order to give Olivia time to escape, that I had need of all my friendship

ship

THE MASQUERADE. 7

ship for her husband, added to his presence, to check the strong desire I felt to gratify my wishes upon her exquisitely-inviting lips. Married men are highly indiscreet in toying with their wives before us single fellows—A great deal of self-denial, I assure you, is necessary upon such occasions.

You have still evaded an answer to my question, with regard to Sedley's designs upon Olivia : but I shall soon be in town ; I shall then expect to hear something about them.

I forgot to tell you that in a short time after our return from the garden, Miss Heber came to the Wood, accompanied by a most agreeable young fellow, tall, genteel, and more graceful in his appearance than people bred up altogether in the country usually are.

A lively glow overspread his face on lady Avon's approach, who received him with all the familiarity of a sister, calling

B 4

him

8 THE MASQUERADE.

him dear Edmund, and telling him she was extremely glad to see him.

A kind of forced smile just gleamed on his face, on which a pleasing melancholy appeared when he entered the room. He addressed a short but polite compliment to her on her marriage, endeavouring to stifle a sigh which heaved his bosom at the conclusion of it. He soon afterwards took his leave.

Lord Avon eagerly asked who he was?

“He is the son of Mr. Hastings,” replied my lady, “a gentleman who was once a neighbour to my grandfather—Edmund having been brought up with us from our infancy, has always been looked on by us as our brother.”

I cast my eye over all the three ladies during that speech; and in the features of the person who uttered it, saw nothing but the sweetness of her disposition and the openness of her heart, which were, indeed, strongly expressed in them.

Olivia.

THE MASQUERADE. 9

Olivia also looked unmoved; but Alicia hastily threw down her eyes, and coloured.

I was, afterwards, informed, that this young Hastings had, from a boy, distinguished Eudocia from her companions, by a partial fondness, but had never made any declaration of love to her; that he had been deeply dejected ever since her marriage, and that he was absent from home when he first came down; but that, upon his return, as he desired to see the happy man to whom she was married, Miss Heber had brought him to pay his compliments.

I rallied lady Avon during the remainder of the evening, upon her conquest over this amiable rustic; and my lord joined with me, who would have been as well pleased, I believe, if Edmund had not made his appearance among us: tho' I dare swear that Eudocia feels no particular prejudices in his favour.—

B 5

I seized

10 THE MASQUERADE.

I seized an opportunity when she left the room, to warn my lord against giving way, on every trifling occurrence, to suspicions which she did not deserve; adding, that the encouragement of them might, in time, occasion a breach between them; and that he must make allowances for the extreme vivacity of her temper; and by placing, or seeming to place, an entire confidence in her, win her heart to himself.—

“How!” cried he, starting, “do you really think that I am not in possession of her heart? that she does not love me?”

“I have no doubt concerning her love for you,” said I; “but in order to prevent a diminution of it, let me recommend to your serious attention, those lines of the poet.

Be to her faults a little blind,
Be to her virtues very kind;
Let all her ways be unconfin'd,
And clap your padlock on her mind.

He

THE MASQUERADE. II

He shook his head at me—He has not resolution enough, I fear, to follow my advice.

Our journey is put off for a few days, or I should not have written so long an epistle.

LETTER XXX.

Sir CHARLES SEDLEY to Col. ACKWORTH.

THEY are all here again—But the devil of it is, my lord and lady seem to be reconciled again, and in such a manner as to make me despair of a second rupture. She is all loveliness and condescension: he all transport and tenderness.

My pretty little Olivia appears to have changed both her humour and complexion since she left London—She is grown much paler, and infinitely more shy of me. The beauteous lady Avon, on the contrary, is returned with more bloom in her cheeks and more lustre in her eyes, and treats me with her usual politeness and freedom.—Yet I think I can observe that Avon is more about her than ever—He does not, indeed, seem
to

THE MASQUERADE. 13

to lay any restraint on her inclination, but is so eternally at her elbow, that a man must be more dextrous than the devil, to find an opportunity of saying or doing any thing to the purpose. I must, therefore, *finesse* a little.

Olivia, I find, is still partial to me, tho' confoundedly unwilling to let her partiality in my favour appear—She has, I suppose, been telling tales, and some old maiden aunt in the country has bid her beware.—The pretty, tender creature, however, is not absolutely averse to me—She fetched a deep sigh, a sigh from the bottom of her heart, when I pressed her hand last night. I shall, therefore, stick close to her, for the present at least; and so you may tell Mountney that I am absolutely fixed upon Olivia, and desire him to keep at a proper distance. I am confoundedly disappointed tho' to find myself obliged to begin where I designed to end. Every woman but lady Avon, after having flown from her husband in
resent-

14 THE MASQUERADE.

resentment, would have received a thousand amorous overtures by this time from all the men of gallantry in town:—But there is I know not what—there is such a graceful dignity in her carriage, such a forbidding reserve in her manner, and yet at the same time such an inviting softness in her eyes, that tho' every man is dying for her, no man dares to attack her.

LETTER

LETTER XXXI.

MISS OLIVIA HEBER to Miss HEBER.

I HAVE done every thing in my power, my dear sister, to follow your advice ; which is, I well know, sincerely given for the promotion of my happiness—But oh ! my Alicia, you do not know Sir Charles.

When we first met, after our return to London, I put on all the reserve which I had promised to assume : but how soon, how very soon did he find that I was acting a part in opposition to nature!—He has been continually by my side ever since I came to town, and has seized every opportunity to give me the strongest proofs of his attention : I with difficulty, however, shunned him till last night—but then my endeavours proved unsuccessful.

Last

16 THE MASQUERADE.

Last night Eudocia, not being quite well, tho' really not indisposed enough to confine herself to her apartment, was intreated by my lord, (who is fearful lest the wind should blow upon her), so earnestly to stay alone in her dressing-room, that she complied with his request.

Happening to go into the parlour for something, I saw Sir Charles, who protested that I should not leave him, till I had informed him what he had done to displease me. I made twenty idle excuses to get from him; but at the same time looked so silly, and so disconcerted, that I betrayed myself; and upon his urging me to let him know only what share he possessed of my regard, felt such a sinking at my heart that I could not speak: and my sighs, I am afraid I may add my tears, discovered what I wished to conceal.—Yet he is not sufficiently satisfied with me, to apply to my father—The moment he is sure of my heart, he says, the moment will he solicit his approbation—How
happy

THE MASQUERADE. 17

happy shall I be, if ever that time arrives!

I have acquainted lady Avon with his behaviour—She wishes I may find Sir Charles the man I wish him to be, but advises me not to put much confidence in him till I see farther.

Mr. Mountney looks upon me, methinks, with an eye of pity, while all my glances are confined to him alone who has possession of my heart.—

Do not chide me, Alicia—I pity, I feel for you—Yet Edmund is not half so lovely as Sir Charles.

LETTER

L E T T E R XXXII.

Sir CHARLES SEDLEY to Col. ACKWORTH.

I HAVE, once more, hopes—of some of the family at least—I have watched Olivia as closely as a rattle-snake does a lizzard, longing to see her drop into my mouth ; but she was wondrous cold till t'other evening—I luckily found her alone, and swore not to part with her till she had told me the true cause of her reserve. It was some time before I could make my coy gentlewoman discover what passed in that little shy heart of her's ; tho' I plainly saw that she wished to make me acquainted with it. In short I so plied her with questions, all of the tender kind, and backed them with so many soft insinuating caresses, that the poor girl became half intoxicated, and could only reply with sighs and tears—

Faith

THE MASQUERADE. 19

Faith I was almost tempted to avail myself of the critical moment; but tho' a pretty knowing one in matters of this kind, I was afraid to trust to appearances—I did not, to tell you the truth, think myself quite sure of her: besides, I could not be certain that somebody might not come.—

I was right—A rap at the door roused her from my bosom, on which she had sunk in a fit of tenderness; and I could not prevail on her—tho' nobody was let in—to stay any longer with me, unless I would that moment consent to write to old Heber, and make a solemn offer of myself—Catch me at that if you can, colonel—I have told you, before, my sentiments of the extreme indelicacy of such proceedings; and do not despair, now, of carrying my designs into execution without them. But I must keep close to her—By doing so I shall, in the long run, find opportunities with lady Avon, as she and her friend are almost inseparable—Harkee,
—George,

20 THE MASQUERADE.

—George, talk to me no more about honour—Nonsense—If a woman will not take care of her own honour, she certainly sets no value on it; and I may as well take advantage of her carelessness as another.—You may preach till doomsday; but I say, and insist upon it, that the woman, on such an occasion, is the principal delinquent—We lie, we flatter, and we swear most profusely, to be sure; but those who know the world, know that our words are meer counters—She, therefore, who is weak enough to give credit to them, deserves to be bubbled.—However, if they knew how much the most abandoned among us adore virtue when we find it, many of them would hold out much longer than they do.

LETTER

THE MASQUERADE. 25

LETTER XXXIII.

Lord AVON to Mr. MOUNTNEY.

LAST night my Eudocia appeared, for the first time, at Ranelagh; and to my sorrow, she likes it so well, that I believe she will never be absent when the doors are open. With pain did I see the men run over her beauties with greedy eyes; with pain did I observe her flutterings whenever a gay figure approached her. I endeavoured, several times, to catch a moment, to ask her opinion concerning a place which she had never seen before—But I could not, possibly, get near enough to her to satisfy my curiosity, so numerous were her admirers crowding about her: and I dare say she thought no more of me while so surrounded, than if she had never known me.

Disgusted

22 THE MASQUERADE.

Disgusted at such intolerable giddiness, I went and sat down on a seat, from which I could see her and her enamoured train pass and repass in review before me.

I was sick to death at the quantity of nonsense which I heard; yet I must own that, exclusive of her smiles, of which she was very liberal, I saw nothing really censurable in her behaviour.

Sedley and lord Chester were the most busy about her; but I thought she endeavoured to keep them both, particularly the former, at a decent distance.

Sedley is too free: I wish I could handsomely get rid of his acquaintance.

She dropped her fan: Sedley took it up, and begged her permission to make use of it for a few minutes, as the heat of the room was excessive.

She replied, with a reserved air, that she wanted it herself.

He

THE MASQUERADE. 23

He then presented it to her, affectedly repeating,

Favours to none, to all she smiles extends;
Oft she rejects, but never once offends.

Lord Chester immediately added,

Bright as the sun her eyes the gazers strike,
But like the sun reflect on all alike.

Lady Tameworth, who was of the party, cried, "Vastly pretty, indeed, my lord."

Eudocia's eyes, conscious of their powers of pleasing, rolled in an ecstasy of delight, and seemed to acquire additional spirit, from the admiring multitude.—A fine amusement for so doating a husband as myself: it might have done well enough for one of your modern animals, your meerly nominal husbands; but by a man of feeling and sensibility, who took a partner for life, in order to have her to himself,

24 THE MASQUERADE.

self, it was not, you may be sure, to be endured. And yet now, to follow your advice, I must, I suppose, let her alone, suffer her to do just as she thinks proper, and wait submissively till she has lavished all her spirits upon a crowd of fluttering coxcombs; and then take her, surfeited with pleasure, and half dead with fatigue, to my arms. Oh! woman! woman!—I wonder why I married;—and yet, when I consider how many delicious moments I have passed with her, moments which I should not have enjoyed with any other of her sex, I would endure all this and more to call her mine: but while she can relish life thus without me, my felicity cannot be compleat. I would have her the happiest of her sex, but then I would be the person alone to make her so.—If I am not *that* person, I must be wretched beyond expression.

I have just started a scheme which may, possibly, be of service to me. I will pretend indifference; nay more, I will affect

THE MASQUERADE. 25

to be fond of another woman—Such an alteration in my behaviour will surely move her, if she has any love remaining for me: it will force her to discover it. How transported shall I be to see her fighting and dying for me, as I have been, and am now, at this instant, for her.—There's rapture in the thought!—I'll proceed to action immediately. The difficulty will be to find a proper woman with whom I may be in no danger of going too far; I mean upon the lady's account, for I can never *love* any woman after Eudocia.

On recollection, there is a pretty, young, lively widow, a relation of lady Tameworth's, who was at our marriage. She has kept up an acquaintance with lady Avon ever since, and has been always mighty civil to me. She was of our party last night—Chance made it necessary for me, out of politeness, to hand her to her coach. She is not handsome enough to be mentioned with Eudocia; yet she is

26 THE MASQUERADE.

sufficiently handsome to make any man like her. I will tell my wife that I am violently charmed with Mrs. Minchin upon a nearer acquaintance, and see what effect that intelligence has on her.

LETTER

THE MASQUERADE. 27

LETTER XXXIV.

Mr. MOUNTNEY to Lord AVON.

YOU never was more wrong in your life. This scheme of your's is the worst you could have thought upon—It will not, I dare say, have the intended effect on lady Avon; and it may draw you into many difficulties.

Upon my soul, Avon, you make yourself too uneasy about meer trifles.—My lady may certainly amuse herself very innocently in public, with a party of her and your relations and friends, without giving you any room to be jealous. You will really, by pursuing this plan, either drive her to extremities, or get an entanglement upon your hands; never considering how much you may injure the character of the lady whom you pretend to admire.—Were you a single fellow like myself, you might flirt with any body, now and then, with

C 2

safety;

28 THE MASQUERADE.

safety: but the public attentions of a married man—and they *must* be public to answer your purpose—will certainly injure the reputation of the woman who is distinguished by them. Besides, supposing this objection to your conduct could be obviated, can you, finding jealousy so troublesome a passion, wish to make your Eudocia sensible of its pangs? Reflect a little, my friend, before you enter upon the execution of so wild a scheme. That lady Avon may be rather more fond of the pleasures of the world, just at this time, than you wish her to be, I will allow; but, believe me, you will sooner cure her by satiating her with them, than by affronting her with gallantry to another woman. You confess that you do not yet see any thing actually blameable in your wife's carriage: but how can you be sure that your behaviour will not stir up the spirit of retaliation in her?—Take care, my lord; you really don't think enough of what you are about.

LETTER

THE MASQUERADE. 29

LETTER XXXV.

Lord AVON to Mr. MOUNTNEY.

THE die was cast before I received your answer—your precautions were well meant, but they came too late—as to my scheme's not having the intended effect on my wife, I am of your mind, though it cuts me to the soul to think that she does not love me well enough to trouble herself about me.—With regard to myself, I shall be in no danger of falling in love a second time: with regard to the lady, as she is a widow of about eight and twenty, with a good jointure, and a handsome fortune besides, has been trusted to her own discretion these four years, and is an intimate of my wife's, there is no fear of her character's suffering from my being very civil to her only in lady Avon's sight. She has, to

31 THE MASQUERADE.

encourage me, rather made me some advances—Oh! that I could see my Eudocia as anxious about me as I have been about her! —I will try, however—the temptation is too strong to be resisted.

LETTER

THE MASQUERADE. 30

LETTER XXXVI.

SIR CHARLES SEDLEY to Col. ACKWOTH.

BETTER and better: things go on rarely, at present.—Avon, would you believe it, is become, on a sudden, mighty sweet upon Mrs. Minchin—whether he really is in love with her, or only pretends to be so, I will not attempt to say; but I see plainly that he may be drawn into a situation he is not aware of.

—This widow must not presume to vie with lady Avon in point of beauty; but she is agreeable in the strongest sense of the word.—Have you never met with a woman who, after having made no impression on you at first, became, on a nearer acquaintance, almost imperceptibly, attractive to a great degree; the more attractive for having been gradually so?—I take Mrs. Minchin to be exactly such a kind of woman.

32 THE MASQUERADE.

man.—She is lively, but her liveliness is not at all like lady Avon's—whose vivacity arises from her innocence and good humour; and her heart laughs in her features. On the contrary, Mrs. Minchin's mirth is forced; she strives to be sprightly in order to please; and, possibly, conceals a vast stock of tenderness, which would not fit so well in public, upon a young widow whose husband has been dead but a few years; a man who, it is thought, neither improved his health nor fortune, by marrying. She is also, I know, a very great admirer of lord Avon, and was heard to say to a female friend, when he married—which faithful friend repeated it to another faithful friend as an immense secret—“Then the handsomest and most desirable man in the world is lost.”—There now!—don't you think that he will draw himself into a fine dilemma? If any thing can shake lady Avon's virtue, this procedure certainly must; if it does not stagger it, I'll give her up.

LETTER

THE MASQUERADE. 33

LETTER XXXVII.

Lady AVON to Miss HEBER.

I AM actually ashamed of having been so long without writing to you, my dear Alicia; but since the opening of Ranelagh, my house have been more engaged than ever. How shall I give you an idea of this most elegant—I may add superb—and pleasureable place? I am afraid I shall not do justice to it with my descriptive pen. In short, next to the opera house on a masquerade night, it is the delightfulest place I ever saw in my life, and admirably calculated for people of my turn, who love to see and be seen, and to laugh and to chat, and so forth. A masquerade, indeed, is a more spirited entertainment, because it admits of a more free circulation of wit and humour; but then those who personate a character for the evening, ought to keep it

34 THE MASQUERADE.

up: now to keep up a character with propriety on such an occasion, is to act with considerable restraint; and if, from want of taste, judgment, or vivacity, you enter not thoroughly into your part, and move and speak agreeably to the dress assumed, you appear in a ridiculous light for having mistaken either your abilities or your genius: whereas at Ranelagh, whether you are gay or serious, sprightly or dull, you will always find somebody to afford you amusement; you have no kind of trouble, but drop in just at what hour you please; you meet all your acquaintance, and see, and hear, and are diverted with every thing which comes in your way. For my part, I go every night, and with the greater pleasure, as my lord makes no opposition to my appearance there—He grumbled, indeed, a little, at first; but now he seems to receive as much satisfaction from a Ranelagh-evening as I do, or amuses himself somewhere else.

Poor

THE MASQUERADE. 35

Poor Olivia is almost tired already of this charming spot, and therefore I frequently make a party with Mrs. Minchin, a prodigious agreeable woman, distantly related to lady Tameworth. She happens to be a favourite of my lord's, so he cannot but approve of my being in her company. For these two nights he has pleaded an engagement in another place; on those nights I fastened on lady Tameworth, not chusing, when my lord is not with me, to go with people, against whom he may, I think, have any objections.

We are, at present, in a less squabbling state, than we have been since we were married—My lord goes one way, and I another.—This way of life is certainly very polite; but this sort of politeness is not entirely to my taste: for tho' I love entertaining company, and agreeable conversation, I never enjoy such company and conversation thoroughly, unless my lord partakes of the pleasure which I receive from them.—Now, to be sure, I cannot expect

36 THE MASQUERADE.

him to feel always as I do, because our dispositions are different : tho' a young man, he is some years older than *I* am, and naturally of a more serious cast—Some allowance too must be made, supposing myself to be thought of too lively a turn, for my education as well as my age: my lord had been brought up in the *world*, and was grown weary of it just when I began to be struck with its gaieties : the world, I confess, has many charms for *me*, but not enough to make me forget what I owe to my lord.

You won't laugh at me, I know, Alicia,—tho' Mrs. Minchin laughed—when I tell you, that I was unhappy at his supping out a few evenings ago, and not coming home till past two the next morning.—I could by no means compose myself to sleep : and yet I took no notice of his coming home so late to me : while he permits me to please myself in my own way, he should, undoubtedly, be suffered to enjoy himself in *his* uncensored. — But he came home strangely disordered—at least,
I fan-

THE MASQUERADE. 37

I fancied so,—possibly, however, I might be mistaken, for I was not quite well.—

He, at first, came and looked on me; but seemed fearful of waking me: to say truth, I was half asleep; but hearing him fetch a deep sigh, I lifted up my eyes, and asked him if he was not well.

He only answered by making a thousand excuses for having disturbed me—begging me to go to sleep, if I possibly could, and not to think of him who was not worthy of my attention.

I was extremely at a loss to know what he meant, and finding that he could not very well explain himself, concluded he was fatigued also, and wished him a good night.

We are very good friends; but yet, he is apparently altered. He seems to be frequently buried in thought. He is less at home: kind and obliging, indeed, when he is with me, but no longer troubles himself about my engagements nor my conduct: I go where I will, I do what I will, with-

38 THE MASQUERADE.

without producing any anxious enquiries: —I hope I shall be able, however, to give a good account of my behaviour: I love cheerfulness, 'tis true, no body more; but if I am at all acquainted with my own heart, the strongest powers on earth cannot make me prefer any man to my lord.

I greatly disapprove of Sir Charles's carriage to Olivia and to myself — I am sure he deceives my dear friend: but he shall never deceive me. Were he ever so agreeable, I should despise him for supposing me capable of falling into the snares which he is laying for me: yet I will not openly quarrel with him till Olivia sees as thoroughly into his real character as I do. His trifling with her is too particular to be overlooked, and it is with the sincerest concern I perceive it begins to injure her health. He is artful enough to make her believe that he is fond of *her*, and of *her* alone: now it is pretty plain to me, that he is fond of no human creature except himself. Time, I hope, will convince our
dear

THE MASQUERADE. 39

dear Olivia, that he is not deserving of her esteem.—There is no fear of his making her miserable by *marriage*, and I dare believe that her virtuous principles will prevent her from being rendered miserable by him in any other way.—Yet she pines, I am afraid, for this undeserving man,

LETTER

40 THE MASQUERADE.

LETTER XXXVIII.

Lord AVON to Mr. MOUNTNEY.

YOU are right, my dear friend. You kindly pointed out to me the precipice to which I was hurrying, but I had not power to shun it—I have not only ruined my own peace, but the peace of an amiable woman who loves me.—To fill up the measure of my folly, I have rendered myself totally unworthy of my wife, my Eudocia, my angel. How shall I look up to her again! where is that openness of heart, that honest tenderness, that sincerity of passion, of which I so lately boasted?—What fools, I may add what villains, does suspicion make of us? Had I not suspected a dear creature who, I now firmly believe, never erred, I had been but too happy. How readily does one deviation from reason make way for another! From
being

THE MASQUERADE. 41

being causelessly jealous of my wife, I became desirous of rendering her, if possible, jealous of *me*: By being *so* desirous, I have undone myself.

I fixed upon Mrs. Minchin as a woman proper for my purpose for two reasons:—I saw her often with my wife, and she had not a little encouraged me to believe that she liked me. I made the first overtures by paying her numberless assiduities, when in company with Eudocia, whom I, at the same time, neglected; and perceiving that Eudocia took no notice of them, I doubled them, still in hopes to rouse her, but in vain:—too attentive to her own amusements, or confiding too much in my protestations, to imagine me capable of preferring any other woman to herself, she either quite overlooked my behaviour, or concluded it to arise from nothing but a desire to distinguish her particular favourite, as Mrs. Minchin appeared to be, next to Olivia. But tho' my Eudocia discovered nothing new or uncommon in my carriage to

Mrs.

42 THE MASQUERADE.

Mrs. Minchin, *she* discerned a singularity in it, and discerned it with a pleasure too great to be concealed. In short, she gave me all the encouragement that the warmest lover could expect; and, as I could not check her in public without spoiling my plan, I went from one step to another, till she, by almost imperceptible degrees, made me, by her flattery, feel something like a pleasure in being near her.—No sooner did she perceive that she had made a considerable impression upon me, than she became still more and more insinuating and seducing; attaching herself in so particular a manner to me, that I grew insensibly off my guard, and complied with an invitation to sup with her alone at her own house.—I was there, I suppose, unnecessarily soft and civil; for she made a full declaration of her sentiments, which were of the tenderest nature, protesting that she had long entertained them for me, and for no living creature but me: adding, however, at the same time, with a deep sigh which agitated
a very

THE MASQUERADE. 43

a very fine bosom, not entirely covered, while her eyes, strongly expressive of the tender passion, were still more eloquent than her words, that since fate had otherwise disposed of me, she could now hope for nothing but my friendship, which I could not, she thought, without being divested of humanity, refuse her.

I was, you may imagine, a little surprized that matters had gone so far—Had I risen and left her then, all would have been right, at least on *my* side ;—and I, at first, certainly intended to leave her ; but, whether she guessed my purpose or not, I cannot tell ; in order to induce me to stay with the less reluctance, she obliged me to give her the relation of my amour with my wife, which she had long wished to hear, she said, from my own mouth.

I complied with pleasure, as I always love to dwell on the delightful subject.—But—will you not be astonished to hear, that while I was breathing the warmest expressions in praise of my charming Eudocia,

44 THE MASQUERADE.

cia, I was, at that very instant, weakening my attachment to her?—I am ashamed to say I *was*. — The conversation, occasioned by my narrative, naturally turned upon love, and my agreeable widow knew perfectly well how to improve that animating subject to her own advantage.—Shall I proceed?—My passions were vanquished, tho' my heart remained untouched, and she made me, apparently, every thing she wished me to be.

As soon, however, as the delirium of the moment was over, reflection returned with double force — my eyes were opened, and I saw my folly and my guilt in the strongest light.

My fair companion seemed to be utterly unable to support herself under the consciousness of her criminal conduct: with frequent sighs and floods of tears she lamented her own imbecility, and intreated me, on her knees, not to expose her. — “ Do not publish my infamy, said she, sobbing as if her heart would break, nor increase the se-

vere

THE MASQUERADE. 45

were torments which I endure, by forsaking me—Do not, oh! do not abandon me—Consider, my lord, that I have given up honour, every thing on which a woman ought to set the highest value, to gratify my passion for him who is dearer to me than life itself.—Do not then forget what I have sacrificed for you—do not neglect me now, in this degrading, but I hope, pitiable situation—I can bear any thing but your indifference.”

Only think, Mountney, what a heart, full of sensibility as mine is, must have felt when I saw so amiable a woman at my feet bathed in tears, and sinking under affliction exquisitely oppressive, occasioned by the indulgence of a passion for me, which tho’ criminal was, nevertheless, tender and affecting beyond all conception——Had I known Mrs. Minchin before Eudocia, nothing could have entirely won me from her—as no woman ever was so enchantingly pleasing in those moments when she threw off all reserve, and gave a loose to her natural

46 THE MASQUERADE.

tural sensations : but the hopes of finding Eudocia, one day, as fond of me, the consciousness of having wronged *her* who never had injured me, tho' I^a was cruel enough to suspect her fidelity, and the necessity I am now under of breaking off all commerce with Mrs. Minchin, who doats on *me* with the same ardor as I do on my wife, almost tear my heart in pieces, and drive me to madness.

Had I taken *your* advice, Mountney, I had done well ; but who can always listen to the dictates of reason ?

I stayed with this intoxicating creature till past two in the morning — Then, I started from my chair, and hurried home, after having been very tenderly and repeatedly reproached for being in such haste, and as many times most ardently intreated to return the next evening. — I promised every thing to get away from her.

When I came home, I found my dear, innocent angel asleep. I softly opened the curtain to steal a look at a face so infinitely

THE MASQUERADE. 47

superior to that which I had quitted—She waked; and seeing my inquietude, for my mind was tortured beyond expression, kindly asked me if I was not well.

I did not deserve so much regard, Mountney; her affectionate question, therefore, cut me to the soul, and considerably increased the anguish I endured from the sharp stings of recollection.

Begging her to go to rest, I could not help adding, with a sigh, that I was not worthy of her attention or esteem.

She opened her dear eyes wide, with astonishment; but there could be no explanation. — There — there's the mischief. — Tho', happily, she did not seem to wish for any. I am, however, unspeakably miserable. — One woman is already ruined by me beyond all reparation; and when my Eudocia comes to the knowledge of my perfidy, may she not also hate and despise me for it, and extinguish all my hopes of pardon and returning love. — My soul shivers at the discouraging apprehension.

Be-

48 THE MASQUERADE.

Besides, if I should catch her tripping now,—I madden at the idea — with what justice, with what propriety, can I upbraid her with the commission of a crime, of which I have, myself, been guilty ? How can I, after having violated my conjugal vows, expect my wife to preserve her fidelity unshaken.

This dishonourable proceeding of mine, however, has not made me less jealous ; it has only rendered me ashamed of my suspicions, and did I imagine that they were not altogether groundless, I should, I believe, run distracted.

I had no rest all night. At breakfast I was lost in thought ; nor were the lively, innocent smiles of my angel capable of diverting me. My reflections were too melancholy to be removed by her kind and chearful endeavours.

At last, as if willing to make me uncommonly happy, (Olivia being gone out of the room for something) she threw her lovely arm round my neck, and discovered so
much

THE MASQUERADE. 49

much anxiety about me, that I soon became quite enraptured ; and forgetting every thing but the present happy moment, let my head fall on her charming bosom, while I listened with ecstasy to a thousand questions concerning my health, without hearing a single interrogation relating to my uncommon behaviour.

While I was giving up my whole soul to joys unfelt before, the door opened, and —Mrs. Minchin entered.

You may easily conceive how Mrs. Minchin and I looked upon the occasion ; and will, I dare say, readily believe me, when I tell you, that Eudocia was the only unembarrassed person in the room. The dear, innocent creature, conscious of no ill, appeared a thousand times more beautiful, from the modest glow which overspread her face, on being thus surprised.—Her rival, on the contrary, coloured up to the eyes from guilt, love, jealousy, and rage, which strongly agitated her bosom, while she swelled to vent

50 THE MASQUERADE.

what she was obliged totally to suppress.—Her feelings were, in consequence of such a suppression, doubly painful.—A frown, a severe frown, however, which she darted at me, on her entrance, gave some little ease to her full heart: but she was immediately forced to convert it into a smile when she accosted my wife.

To what meannesses, to what contemptible subterfuges, do our vices reduce us!

I looked, I am sure, like a villain and a fool, and would have given a large sum to have been a hundred miles from the place I was in. I scarce knew how to speak to this very woman in the morning, with whom I had committed a thousand amorous follies the night before—I absolutely felt blushes in my cheeks, and turned away my head, to conceal sensations which I could no way restrain.

Mrs. Minchin, who seems very well versed in the art of dissimulation, soon recovered herself, and fell into the common chit-chat of the morning with my wife.

I took

THE MASQUERADE. 51

I took an opportunity, while she was so engaged, to slip out of the room, sneaking off from two charming women, whom I had injured, and with the sight of whom, therefore, my eyes were pained.

I revived as soon as I got out of my own house.—How little, how very little have I made myself!—

I returned time enough to dress before dinner. Bingley then put the following letter into my hand, which had been, he said, just brought by a chairman.

To the Right Honourable Lord Viscount
AVON.

AFTER what passed last night, had I not reason to expect a very different reception in the morning, when my fond impatience to see you again brought me to your house. — Shocked to the soul at catching you doating on my too lovely rival, I yet felt myself inclined to excuse you, if you had but discovered the slightest considera-

D 2

tion

52 THE MASQUERADE.

tion for me, whose passion for you has been of a much longer date than her's, and a thousand times more disinterested, as I have sacrificed every thing which ought to have been most dear to me, to indulge *you* to the very height of your wishes ; at the same time, I will honestly confess, that I gratified my own.—But should my doating on you to this monstrous extreme, render you less grateful, less tender, to one, whose heart beats for you alone, and who can enjoy no felicity except she possesses a share of *your's*?—I can still pardon your cruel neglect this morning, if you will not fail to let me see you to-night—If you disappoint me, my lord, I swear by all that's solemn, I will discover your perfidy to lady Avon to-morrow.—I cannot conclude thus harshly—Must I be obliged to threaten the man whom I love?—No—let me but see you, and all shall be forgotten and forgiven.

Your's for ever,

HARRIOT.

I can't

THE MASQUERADE. 53

I can't describe the agitation into which I was thrown by reading this letter. I knew not how to act—One minute, I determined to send her word, that I never would see her any more;—but the dread of her making a thorough breach between me and my adored Eudocia, kept me under such restraint, that I could not bring myself to dispatch such a message to her.—I am come to that pass now, that I dare not even be honest. How frequently fatal are the first deviations from virtue; and how strongly ought we to guard ourselves against the temptations spread by vice, to render us unworthy of being ranked among human beings!

What a bustle do I make about an affair which would give Sedley the highest satisfaction!—But you know, Mountney, I ever held it barbarous as well as dishonourable to attempt to injure the weaker sex, who are formed by nature to stand in need of our protection—I never took any delight in practising the arts of seduction, by which

54 THE MASQUERADE.

so many men ruin those women whom they pretend to love; and always was of opinion, that a man of sense ought to be ashamed of those arts, looking on the seducer as an infamous *character*.—How came I to be thus, at last, entangled!—But you, tho' at a distance, saw the danger into which I rushed with my eyes open.

To what purpose, however, are all these reflections! they are now too late—the mischief is done.

Distracted with terror lest she should, as I have hinted, make any discovery to my wife, I went at the appointed hour.—There—but I cannot paint the scene—she fainted away on my bosom, and so melted me with her sighs and tears, and alarming apprehensions, that I could not help compassionating the distress which I had, involuntarily, occasioned.

Thus am I sinking deeper and deeper under the double weight of guilt and shame. Harriot has all my pity; Eudocia all my love, my heart, my soul.—Yet, in
the

THE MASQUERADE. 55

the midst of this confusion and disquietude, many times in a day do I wish that my wife was as tender, as fond as my — I will not write a word which I abhor.

Tell me, now, my dear Ned, how I shall get rid of this horrid business, and you will be my friend indeed!

D 4 LETTER

LETTER XXXIX.

MISS OLIVIA HEBER to MISS HEBER.

AT length, my dear sister, I am come to a resolution, whatever it may cost me, to conquer an inclination which can never make me happy.

Sir Charles, I see, loves nobody but lady Avon, who, infinitely wiser than I am, knows how to despise a man, who dares to insult her with a behaviour, of which, she is sensible, she ought not to approve. Lively, and, in appearance, thoughtless as she is, sometimes she is, nevertheless, discreet. I once thought, that my lord would be much better satisfied with her, if she gave up more of her time to him; but I can't tell what to think now. I am afraid he begins to be tired of waiting for what will, in all probability, never happen.—He never used to leave her, but when necessity

THE MASQUERADE. 57

cessity urged him: he is now, frequently, absent, and especially in an evening, for several hours together. My lady takes notice of his late hours to me, but not in a manner expressive of her disapprobation: she only mentions his staying from her, as she would any common occurrence. Yet, she seems glad, I think, to see him when he returns.

Where-ever my lord goes, he is not much diverted, I imagine; for he always looks melancholy and unhappy.

Mr. Mountney called on us t'other night, just after he came to town, and appeared to be surprized at not finding my lord at home.

My lady said, with a lively smile, "Your friend is grown a fashionable husband, Mr. Mountney."

He replied, rather gravely, "Is he not grown so because your ladyship is too fashionable a wife?"

Eudocia coloured; but, without seeming to be in the least offended, entered into so

58 THE MASQUERADE.

agreeable a conversation with him, that he declared he was quite sorry it was not in his power to stay longer.—When he left us, he desired her to tell my lord that he was going out of town next morning.——But what is all this to the purpose?—Yet I say any thing to hinder my thoughts from dwelling on the subject, in which my heart is most interested, and which I willingly would forget; for while it engages my attention, it murders my peace.

Sir Charles came in soon afterwards, and looked as if he enjoyed my lord's absence; tho' he was obliged to come to *me*, as my lady kept him at a distance.—He can't help being particular to *some* woman.—I will write no more about him at present.

You don't tell me upon what terms you are with Edmund: we do not, therefore, correspond upon a par—You are acquainted with every movement of *my* heart; but keep all the emotions of your own to yourself.—Unkind Alicia,

LETTER

LETTER XL.

Miss HEBER to Miss OLIVIA HEBER.

YOU desire to hear about Edmund; I am but too ready to gratify you; but my long narration will, possibly, prove a dull one. —

You know his partiality to our dear lady Avon from a child, and in what manner he distinguished her as he grew up, by presenting the finest fruit and flowers to her. — You know too, that he was absent from home when Sir William Tameworth fetched away his niece, and carried her to London: and that his melancholy, from the time of his return, increased till she was married.

As he still continued to come to our house, I felt a compassion for him which I could not conceal, and endeavoured, by every method I could think of, to cheer

60 THE MASQUERADE.

his drooping spirits, and remove his dejection : but my endeavours were so ineffectual, that I became almost as melancholy as himself.

By seeing me thus, involuntarily, fall in with his humour, he took a fancy to my company. He sat with me for hours. We sighed together; and seemed, while we mingled our sighs, not to want the addition of words to make us more sociable.

At length he opened his lips, and spoke of our dear Eudocia, but in such terms of admiration and delight, and complained so tenderly of his being for ever deprived of all hopes of trying to succeed with her, that I could no longer support it—I broke out, involuntarily, in the same complaints: I wept, I sobbed, I was almost choaked: at last I said, “ Had she but known what you have suffered, had you but told her how fondly you esteemed her, she *would*, she *must* have heard you, and been happy.”

Here I stopped, conscious of having said too much, yet I was too much concerned for
him

THE MASQUERADE. 61

him to repent of what I had uttered : my heart was full of a pleasing sorrow : I was eager to indulge a kind of delicious grief, rendered so meerly because I was desirous of sharing it with him.

He was far from being unaffected by my sensations on his account :—He ran to me, sat down by me, took my hands in his, telling me at the same time, that tho' he was pained to the heart at giving me any disquiet, he felt a consolation he never thought to have received, from my gentle pity, which had given ease to a bosom quite overwhelmed before by affliction : “But still, dear Alicia, added he, remembrance keeps that affliction alive—What transports would have been mine, if Eudocia could have compassionated my sufferings as much as you do!

I blushed excessively at these words ; I turned my face from him, while he cried, “Do not be displeased either with yourself or me : I am ready to confess, that I have
not

62 THE MASQUERADE.

not yet deserved so great, so desirable a proof of your friendship : but indeed I will not, I cannot be ungrateful."

This speech shocked me still more, and convinced me that he had discovered my sentiments in his favour. I became, therefore, abashed to the greatest degree : my tears, however, continued to flow—I strove to avert my face ; but I could not take my hands from him, which he pressed in his, and frequently kissed, begging me not to make myself uneasy, lest I should by so doing injure my health.

I was not proof against the affecting tenderness of this behaviour—My heart had been before softened beyond expression ; and I could not help telling him, tho' covered with blushes, that his disquietude had touched me, and that I should not be chearful till I saw *him* so.

From that time, till just before lady Avon came down to the Wood, we had several long conversations of the same na-

ture ;

THE MASQUERADE. 63

ture; but in these conversations he never professed more than a sincere friendship for me.

When Eudocia arrived, he was upon a visit to a family about twenty miles off.

At his return, he started to hear of her being at so small a distance from him: yet discovered a desire to see *her* and lord Avon, who was, he said, according to the information he had received, extremely amiable. He, therefore, offered to accompany me one afternoon to the Wood.

I would not dissuade him from such a proceeding, lest he might mistake my motives, tho' I feared that his visit would only increase his vexation: it had, however, a contrary effect—He was, indeed, at first, dejected, but, in a few days, became absolutely another creature.

On my mentioning my surprize, and declaring my pleasure at the agreeable change in his looks and carriage—he replied, that tho' he found Eudocia more lovely than ever, there appeared a thorough ease in her mind,

64 THE MASQUERADE.

mind, which, while he was glad to see it, gave him no advantageous idea of her, as she could not have appeared with so much serenity, after such a difference with my lord, if she had been tenderly attached to him.

Here I took our friend's part, and said, that as my lord had been under a mistake, and accused her wrongfully, I could see no reason for her being uneasy after a reconciliation between them.

"I will not dispute with you, madam," replied he; but I am sure, that had you been in *her* place, you would not have been so easy after such a disagreement."

I made no answer. I dared not to proceed upon a subject, with any freedom, so delicate and so interesting.

Since that time I have scarce heard him mention lady Avon, but his carriage to me is exactly the same, very obliging; rather more tender than the most affectionate brother's. However, as he only professes the sincerest friendship for me, tho' he is perpetually

THE MASQUERADE. 65

petually with me, I am not encouraged to expect any thing farther; and, therefore, when we are separated, you may imagine that I shall not, as my heart must go with him, be very happy;—yet I don't see what excuse I can frame for the prohibition of his visits to me. My father is, as he ever has been, extremely fond of him.—His character is generally allowed to be faultless; and *his* father knows, undoubtedly, of the intimacy between us.

And now, Olivia, what can I say to you? How can I, with propriety, advise *you*, while I stand so much in need of admonition myself? Yet, tho' I am sensible of my weakness—(if my esteem for so amiable a man must be pronounced a weakness) I am, I freely own, unable to conquer it.

Sir Charles, from what I have heard of him, is not, I think, so deserving a man as Mr. Hastings: but lord and lady Avon know much more about him than I do; therefore, as *they* are your true friends, consult them, and let their decisions influence

66 THE MASQUERADE.

ence your conduct. *They*, as well as I, are inclined to charge him with acting in a dishonourable manner, by not making proper proposals to my father, without whose knowledge and approbation you, certainly, ought not to engage yourself.

LETTER

THE MASQUERADE. 67

LETTER XLI.

Lord AVON to Mr. MOUNTNEY.

I WAS most unfortunate in being from home when you called ; but I am never to be otherwise : every thing goes contrary to my wishes. I wished to talk with you indeed, tho' reason tells me too plainly what I ought to do ; and I had endeavoured to listen to her voice—I resolved to see Harriot no more ; but I had not courage to communicate my determination to her, fearing that her sighs and tears, which I could not help expecting, would melt me to compassion, would almost unman me.—Resolving, however, at all events, to give her up ; and to hinder her from having any opportunity to discover our affair to my wife, by never leaving them together by themselves, I stuck as close as possible
to

68 THE MASQUERADE.

to lady Avon. I was, indeed, frequently shouldered out of my place by her adorers; but I recovered my situation as well as I could. I also endeavoured, to the utmost of my power, to exclude Mrs. Minchin from our parties.—In spite of all my *finesse* she was too cunning for me, and had secured herself a corner in our coach to Ranelagh last Friday, without my knowledge.

I had told lady Avon, that I should make a party, and desired that she would engage nobody but Miss Heber.

While we were sitting after dinner, I accidentally asked her if she had ordered the coach to be ready at the usual hour.

“Why no,” replied she, with a look which expressed an unwillingness to tell me, “Mrs. Minchin can’t go till nine.”

“Mrs. Minchin!” cried I, looking surprized and vexed, “how came she to be of our party? I thought we were to have gone by ourselves.”

“So I designed, said my lady; but she came this morning, while you was with
general

THE MASQUERADE. 69

general Brett, and was so importunate that I could not refuse her."

You cannot think how I was mortified to find, that the very woman, whom I had taken such pains to shun, had contrived to thrust herself into the coach with me; not doubting but she would either make advances, or load me with reproaches, even under the nose of my wife.

Her behaviour was according to my expectations. Resolving to keep up an absolute indifference, she behaved in a manner which was sufficient to discover to the most unexperienced person on what terms we were: yet my Eudocia seemed not to observe her behaviour; but, as soon as we entered the rotunda, left me and the lady to act as we thought proper, and, with Olivia, joined some of her acquaintance.

Fain would I have followed her, in order to have shaken off my widow, or to have availed myself of her *douceurs* to see, agreeably to my first plan, if my Eudocia would
be

70 THE MASQUERADE.

be jealous or not.—But things were gone too far with Mrs. Minchin.

No sooner were we left in a *tête à tête*, in which you may suppose we could not be left long in so public a place, than she told me, that my carriage to her had been inhuman to the last degree; and if I did not immediately consent to go home with her, she could not answer for what her frenzy might drive her to. “I suppose, added she, that, indifferent as you appear to be, you will not hear of my distraction without feeling some remorse for having been the cause of it.—I have loved beyond reason, ’tis true; beyond discretion: but what is one or the other,—(tearing off her gloves with an agitation that actually bordered on madness) when put in competition with the man on whom I doat with the highest extravagance?”

I was really quite frightened at her behaviour—She not only exposed *me* but *herself*. To quiet her, I took her by the hand, and

pro-

THE MASQUERADE. 71

promised to visit her as a friend that very evening.

“ As a friend, my lord ! replied she—must a cold friendship be all the happiness I am to expect with you ? No—I despise, from my soul, such a tame insipid connexion, nor will ever submit to it : take back your heart, my lord, and give it to your idol of a wife : but take care that you and she both do not severely repent of this cursed coolness to a woman, whose person is no way contemptible, tho’ not, perhaps, so beautiful as lady Avon’s, but who loved you with a thousand times more ardor.

This speech, you may imagine, was spoken with a tone and manner adapted to the words : I was amazed and confounded—To increase my shame and disquietude, I saw, on turning my head, my wife and Olivia near me.

I was rooted to the ground ;—yet began to recover a little at Eudocia’s approach, who said, with a most obliging voice,

“ Mrs.

72 THE MASQUERADE.

“Mrs. Minchin, we have been in search of you for some time.”

My widow, tho’ seemingly regardless of every thing but the object of her resentment, on being thus accosted, strove to conceal her emotions, by clapping her handkerchief up to her face; and complaining of a sudden indisposition, begged me to see her home, as she was afraid she should faint away, with the great heat of the room, if she stayed any longer.

I could not well refuse her request; but I went with the utmost reluctance; with particular reluctance, as I left my wife and Olivia with Sedley, who just then joined us, and who saw me lead out Mrs. Minchin with a sneer of satisfaction, for which I could have cut his throat.

During our ride to her house, and after our arrival at it, she practised every art in her power, and employed tears, intreaties, menaces, and fits, to move me.—In return, I endeavoured to make her sensible of the injury

injury I was now doing to her as well as to my wife, by continuing a connexion which had already been carried too far, and which I was determined to break off for ever: assuring her, however, at the same time, that I would always be her sincere friend, tho' I could not be her lover; and adding, that she would, I hoped, when she came to herself, be convinced she ought rather to esteem, than blame, me for so laudable a conduct; a conduct, in which her own honour, as well as mine, was so much concerned.

“ Honour? cried she—Oh! name not the word—The man, who is deaf to compassion, who is destitute of humanity, can have no honour.—Besides, Sir, continued she, rising, with fury in her eyes, as I take it, *my* character alone suffers upon this occasion; your's is rather raised among those of my thoughtless sex who admire lord Avon, as I have done, before they know him to be a villain.”

VOL. II.

E

There

74 THE MASQUERADE.

There was but too much truth in her speech, Mountney; how severely sarcastical against the sex! If women would shun and discover contempt for the man, who, however specious in his appearance, pursues only to betray, there would not be such a character existing among us.—But let me not blame her; I drew her into a criminal connexion; I wish heartily never to have such a connexion with her again—if I can extricate myself out of this confounded affair, without alarming my Eudocia, I never *will*:—But my Eudocia, I am afraid, must be rendered unhappy by this violent woman, whom I could not persuade to part quietly with me, tho' I staid with her till near three o'clock. She vowed to the very last moment, that not only myself, but my wife, should feel the weight of her revenge, as I had for ever ruined her reputation.

I broke from her, at last; but guess my astonishment and concern, to find my Eudocia

THE MASQUERADE. 75

docia sitting in her dressing-room with Olivia, between three and four in the morning!

I ran to her, tho' I was actually ashamed to look at her; and, clasping her in my arms, asked her what she did out of her bed; and if she meant to kill me by hazarding her health?

“Rather let me ask *you*, replied she, with a languor in her sweet eyes that I never had observed before, and that made her appear inexpressibly lovely, whether *your* health may not also be endangered by keeping such late hours? Besides, I was fearful lest you should have met with some accident.—How did you leave Mrs. Minchin?”

I actually blushed, Mountney, while I replied, “Very indifferent”—Turning my head aside, I then asked her if she did not want rest?—On the delivery of *that* question, Olivia wished us good night.

For *my* part, I never closed my eyes—My dear girl, her heart being as pure as

76 THE MASQUERADE.

her person was pleasing, slept sweetly ; and when we rose, expressed a kind inquietude about the lowness of my spirits — (which was the excuse for a dejection, which I could not possibly shake off) that doubly endeared her to me, but at the same time sharpened the pangs which I felt for having acted in so weak, so ridiculous, nay so criminal a manner.

She staid at home with me all the evening, and the following day, and strove, by numberless little engaging ways, to enliven me. She read to me passages out of some of her favourite authors : she sung to me, played upon the harpsichord and mandoline : in short, she was more enchanting than ever ; and I began to come a little to myself, to feel myself as happy as I was when she first became mine.

The dear angel having wearied herself to divert me, and not being very well, grew restless and uneasy after dinner : she sat first in one chair, and then in another ; and, when I declared my anxiety about her, only

THE MASQUERADE. 77

ly replied, with a languishing smile, that she was only sleepy.

I would have had her gone up to her chamber, in order to refresh herself with a little sleep, but she would not leave me.—I rested her head on my shoulder and on my bosom alternately, but nothing would do—At last I took her up in my arms, and laid her on the sofa, and, sitting by her in a chair, *read* while Olivia went to work by us.

She fell asleep presently.

When we had been but a short time in this composed state, *in burst* Mrs. Minchin, followed by Sedley,—the only two people in the world, perhaps, whom I wished not to see. They put me, indeed, into such an ill humour, that I, peevishly enough, begged them not to wake my wife, who was not very well.

The lady looked as pale as death when she entered, and seemed to be in violent hysterics: she trembled; her colour went

78 THE MASQUERADE.

and came, and she sighed as if her heart was just ready to break.

As to the gentleman, he seemed to be all life, gaiety, and assurance : I wondered, indeed, that he had not waked my angel with the noise which he made in coming up stairs ; but she still remained in a profound sleep, while the impertinent devil placed himself directly over against her, and took such a measure of her elegant form with his impudent eyes, that I began to grow exceedingly disturbed.—Never, surely, was there such a groupe of distracted mortals. Sedley sat staring at my wife ; Olivia let fall her work from her fingers in watching his motions ; and Mrs. Minchin fixed her large tender eyes in so expressive a manner on *my* face, that I should have wished myself at a considerable distance, could I have ventured to have left my wife with that fellow Sedley, who really provoked me so by his looks, that I was almost distracted. Rising, therefore, I planted myself exactly between him and
lady

THE MASQUERADE. 79

lady Avon, and endeavoured to draw his attention—he then, artful devil, rising also, dextrously threw himself into such an attitude, on one side of me, that he still faced her, still stood lost in admiration, gazing at her beautiful figure: I became absolutely impatient, and was in a thousand fidgets—At length, I walked backward and forward before her, (tho' softly, for fear of waking her) to hide her, in some measure, from his curious eyes: but he contrived to peep at her, not without smiling at my care to disappoint him; even Mrs. Minchin smiled, in spite of her vexation.—They almost made me mad.

After having been a good while thus tormented, I determined to hinder Sedley, if possible, from enjoying his impertinence: I, therefore, took a handkerchief, and gently hung it over my angel's face; but I could not, with *that*, conceal her fine proportioned figure, nor her charming little foot, which was still exposed to this rogue's view. To provoke me more, neither he

80 THE MASQUERADE.

nor Mrs. Minchin could any way stifle their mirth upon the occasion; especially Sedley, who, willing, I suppose, to have some pretence for his laughing, sat down by Olivia, and making some nonsensical observations upon her work, found fresh matter to excite his laughter. By so doing he threw *her* into confusion, and *me* into a kind of fury; and I was fearful too lest the noise should terrify my Eudocia.

At last she stirred.

Anxiously apprehending, that she might be alarmed at finding her face covered, or surprized at the sight of company, I raised her gently in my arms, hiding her face in my bosom, while I softly told her who were in the room.

She disengaged herself from my arms, blushing, and breathing a thousand sweets, and made an apology to the company, who ought, indeed, to have apologized for their unseasonable intrusion.

Mrs. Minchin immediately changed colour, and soon afterwards fainted away.—

Every

THE MASQUERADE. 81

Every body hurried to assist her, and my charming Eudocia behaved with particular tendernefs.—She recovered, only to let fall a shower of tears. As soon as she could speak, she desired me to assist her in getting to her coach.

I could not refuse her request, tho' I wished to get rid of her for ever.

As she walked to the coach, leaning on my arm, she told me, that she had again exposed herself, and to my wife too; but that my fondness for lady Avon was like a dagger to her heart.—“ Yet I see, added she, that nothing can move you. I have been to blame, my lord; I have tried, but tried in vain, to secure a heart which never *felt for me*.—What have I not lost by your insensibility!—all that I valued most, *your esteem and my own reputation*?—Yet, as lady Avon still treats me with civility, do not, by exposing me to her, doubly mortify me; for I shall then be the object of *her contempt as well as your's*.”

82 THE MASQUERADE.

“ My wife, madam, replied I, will, I am assured, naturally prompted by her good-sense and good-nature, treat you always with politeness ; and you may depend upon the greatest consideration and respect on *my* part.”

“ Consideration and respect ! H—ns ! is it come to this ?—and after having doated on you to an extravagance not to be described, am I to hear no other language from you ? Dare you talk to me of respect ?”

With these words she flung from me into the coach, and immediately drew up the glass, even while I stood bowing before her. I therefore turned short from her, and hurried into the house ; tho’ I presently heard the glass let down, and Mrs. Minchin calling after me.

Just when I entered the parlour, how was I alarmed to see my wife struggling to withdraw her hand from Sedley.

The

THE MASQUERADE. 83

The moment she saw me, she cried, "Upon my word, Sir Charles, you are the most provoking creature I ever met with."

How—how's this? said I, agitated by I know not how many different emotions, which almost rendered me incapable of chastizing that fellow's impudence, who, with all that insolent easiness peculiar to him, answered, "Upon my soul, Avon, there's nothing at all the matter: I only wanted to try my lady's ring upon Miss Heber's finger, to see if it would fit her; because, you know, I may want such a one soon upon a certain occasion: and I dare swear, both the pretty little fingers are of a size, continued he, catching up Olivia's hand, and kissing it eagerly."

I wished him at the devil; for I am certain this was only an excuse; and looked so exceedingly out of humour at him, that I believe he thought he might take his leave: for he left the room soon afterwards, after a long whisper with Olivia.

84 THE MASQUERADE.

Thus am I perpetually tormented: my wife is eternally haunted by this fellow; and I am myself distracted with doubts and fears concerning Mrs. Minchin.—

What measures shall I pursue to get rid of them?

LETTER

THE MASQUERADE. 85

LETTER XLII.

SIR CHARLES SEDLEY to COL. ACKWORTH.

IT is as I guessed : Avon has entangled himself finely with the widow. Matters have been carried to such lengths between them, that she upbraided him t'other night at Ranelagh with having deserted her for his wife ; and in terms too, at once so extravagantly fond, and so exquisitely reproachful, that the attention of a great part of the company was attracted by their conversation.

I, who have always my eyes and ears about me, presently found how things went ; and being unwilling to lose an opportunity of letting my lady see her husband in his true colours, drew her, imperceptibly, near them ; and had the satisfaction to know, that she saw and heard
4 enough

86 THE MASQUERADE.

enough to convince her, that all-beautiful as she is, she cannot keep him entirely to herself—A special hint for her, if she has but spirit to make proper use of it.—But, upon my soul, she is something more than woman,—for (tho' I am sure she is not dull of apprehension) she did not discover the least uneasiness, jealousy, envy, or the slightest signs of any other passion of a disturbing kind, which such a discovery would have naturally raised in the breast of a woman who had a grain of resentment in her constitution.

Possibly, after all, she does not love her husband well enough to be alarmed about him; but then I cannot find that she prefers any other man to him—Some women love only themselves,—perhaps she is one of *them*: and yet I am not inclined to believe that she is of so selfish a cast: she has, on the contrary, an expression in her charming eyes, which shews her to be not insensible to the joys of mutual love; and,
from

THE MASQUERADE. 87

from what I have since seen, I am satisfied she really *does* feel something like a passion, at least, for Avon.

We had a very high scene, you must know, the very next day after the discovery at Ranelagh.

I dropped into my lord's, to see how things went on; and meeting the widow just stepping out of her coach, we proceeded together, and caught them quite *en famille*.—But what a sight was presented to my ravished eyes!—Lady Avon was reclined in the most inviting attitude upon the sofa, asleep; near her sat her watchful dragon reading, while the little attending sister Grace, Olivia, was employed with her needle on the other side.

You have seen a sleeping Venus, by the most eminent French and Italian masters; but you never saw a living lady Avon; only *my* goddess was cloathed—but the drapery was so easy and so elegant, that the imagination was but the more inflamed by it.—She was in a white spotted silk, the folds
of

38 THE MASQUERADE.

of which were, by her negligent attitude, thrown into directions that discovered the lovely formation of her whole figure to the greatest advantage.—Her head rested on one of her beautiful arms, while the other was stretched carelessly by her side. Her face received new charms from the closure of her eyes, too bright to be steadily examined when open : and, as they were shut, the long thick fringe of her eye-lashes appeared more conspicuously pleasing. Her cap, which was a little *derangée* from her situation, had pushed a lock of her fine hair over her snowy forehead, which gave a new, uncommon, and irresistible charm to her whole face ; her other locks, which had not been confined, wantonly strayed over her neck, the lower part of which, and also her delicate bosom, were decently covered with a fine laced muslin handkerchief.

When I had suffered my transported eyes to wander over her lovely features, I threw them downwards to her feet ; one of them

THE MASQUERADE. 89

them peeped from beneath a pink silk petticoat, and lay deliciously exposed to my observation in a white satin slipper.

Imagine what tumultuous emotions were excited by these bewitching objects—I believe I looked all I felt; for the alarmed husband, who envied me only the poor pleasure of gazing on her, rose with impatience, and stood before her to screen her from my admiring eyes.—

Faith, my lord, thought I, if these are your tricks, I shall be too cunning for you—and so, George, I peeped down on one side of him, and then on t'other; while the jealous monkey fretted and fidgetted backward and forward, to a degree beyond all endurance. Even Mrs. Minchin, who had turned pale with envy on her first coming in, could not forbear smiling; but when he covered his wife's face with a handkerchief, we both burst into such a violent laugh, that I actually thought he would have killed us; and I was forced to talk downright nonsense to Olivia, that I might be decent-

ly

90 THE MASQUERADE.

ly authorized to indulge my merriment; and indulge it I did, I swear, most heartily : but I will not answer for my languishing widow ; for, upon Avon's taking his wife in his arms, on her waking, and smothering her divine face in his bosom, which I could very willingly have done for him, Mrs. Minchin swooned away.—

More bustle.

The charming wife good-naturedly ran to assist her rival, who, on recovering, with many sighs and tears, and much disorder, begged my lord to see her to her coach.

Supposing he was then safe for the night, I began to make some slight remarks upon my lord's intimacy with the lady who had just quitted the room, and on his readiness to go off with her : taking lady Avon's delicious hand at the same time, and swearing that were the hand I held but mine, I never could bear to touch another woman's.

I was going, after that speech, almost to devour it with kisses.

In

THE MASQUERADE. 91

In came, at that instant, my lord.

The dear creature and I were in the midst of a delightful struggle, which reduced me to the necessity of inventing a good round lie upon the spot, and sent me to Olivia, in order to save appearances, and make my veracity unsuspected.

What do you think now? can I reasonably encourage any hopes from lady Avon's knowing that her husband has been false to her? Never, I fear, may I venture encourage them; not, at least, while he is so jealous and so watchful over her conduct,—and by his vigilance and suspicion, proves the force of his passion for her. It may be said, indeed, that men are sometimes jealous only of their honour; but when so lovely a woman is in the case, honour will, I fancy, be the last consideration: it would be the last, I know, with me; for let me perish, if I would not sacrifice all mine, this moment, to become possessor of lady Avon.

Write

92 THE MASQUERADE.

Write soon, dear George, to your sincere friend, but in no small perplexity and no little agitation.

CHARLES SEDLEY.

P. S. A jealous husband is the devil to deal with : are you not of *my* mind ? Write soon, write freely, and tell me, on a nice review of my situation, whether I have most reason to hope or despair ?

LETTER

L E T T E R XLIII.

Miss OLIVIA HEBER to Miss HEBER.

YOUR account of your situation with Edmund, my dear sister, has affected me a good deal, because I see you are deeply engaged in a tender affair which is as little likely to prove successful according to your wishes, as that which I have upon my hands is to turn out agreeably to mine: happiness is certainly not often the lot of the most deserving: how then can I, so full of failings, expect it? Even our dear Eudocia, adorned with every charm, and graced with every virtue, cannot keep my lord to herself—Will you believe that lord Avon, whom you saw so excessively fond of her, can possibly love another woman?

“What do you mean?”

I will explain myself:

Among

94 THE MASQUERADE.

Among the number of people who visited lady Avon upon her marriage was a young widow lady ; she was, indeed, present at the ceremony — a Mrs. Minchin ; very agreeable in her person, and of so obliging a behaviour, that Eudocia preferred her to all her new acquaintance, and she was frequently with us both at home and abroad.

My lord, who is polite to all women, was consequently polite to this lady : but, he, in a short time grew particular in his behaviour to her, praised her to Dossy in the highest terms, and treated her with unusual civility.

For some time my lady imagined that he only behaved with the greater civility, as she herself had distinguished her ; and I was, I own, inclined to be of her ladyship's opinion. On a sudden, my lord grew thoughtful and melancholy, and staid from home for hours together.—His frequent and long absences, however, tho' unusual, did not all disturb my lady, as she placed a
thorough

THE MASQUERADE. 95

thorough confidence in him; and as she is lively and gay herself, she said, when we could not help taking notice of these absences, that if *she* did as she pleased, *he* certainly had a right to do the same. She was I believe, at first, too much taken up with her own amusements to think a great deal about *him*.

One night, on his staying out later than he had ever done, and appearing strangely disordered when he came home, she began to fear that he was ill :—As she loved him tenderly, she was alarmed, especially as he continued to be extremely dejected.

The next day she came into *my* room, in which I was reading, and with an uncommon seriousness in her countenance.

Sitting down by me, she said, “ Something has happened, Olivia, which I never could have dreamt of—My lord is, I fancy, very much attached to Mrs. Minchin; but, possibly, my thoughtless behaviour, tho’ I am sure I never designed to offend him by it, has totally disgusted him. Yet I will
not

96 THE MASQUERADE.

not upbraid him, nor let him see that I have discovered what he strives to conceal from me. I love him, I confess, too sincerely to see him thus, apparently, uneasy without wishing to relieve him : and he accepts of my endeavours to please him and to remove his anxiety with seeming transport -- he sighs, however, as if something lay on his mind too heavy to be endured. Would I could remove it! continued the sweet girl, while a tear stood trembling in each eye.

How I loved her, my Alicia, for the mildness and the tenderness of her disposition, for her candour and consideration! yet unwilling to give credit to what I found so disagreeable, and still more unwilling to have her unhappy, I told her that she was, perhaps, mistaken; and might look upon that as a certainty which existed only in her own imagination.

“ No, replied she, calmly : I saw the whole affair this morning; saw it in the looks which Mrs. Minchin darted at me, when

THE MASQUERADE. 97

when she found me with my arm upon my lord's shoulder, and read it still plainer in his confusion on being caught by her leaning on my bosom."

He is not, then, less tender to you, my dear ? said I.

" No, answered she; but he is, somehow, less happy."—

I did not think she was half so miserable as I should have been about such an affair. She continued to behave in her usual manner to my lord, who, tho' he stayed out again very late after that interview, grew fonder of my lady than ever, till Mrs. Minchin forced herself, I may say, to be of our party to Ranelagh, where, by keeping close to lord Avon, she kept off every body else.—My lady and I, therefore, thought it but prudent to leave them to themselves.

Sir Charles Sedley soon after coming up, told us that a fond couple had just had a tender quarrel.—" Not very tender neither, added he, for the lady seemed to be under the dominion of more passions than one.

98 THE MASQUERADE.

She has torn her gloves all to tatters : will you venture to take a peep at the enamoured pair ?”

Eudocia, without thinking that she could be in the least concerned in this affair, followed him, not at all minding which way she was going.

We came at last close behind lord Avon and Mrs. Minchin ; and heard some things which could not be pleasing to my lady ; tho’ I believe no wife could bear the hearing of them better : for with all the good humour in the world she accosted Mrs. Minchin, who was, or pretended to be sick, for an excuse to go out with my lord.

We were left to the care of Sir Charles, who seemed, I thought, too officious about my lady ; and made several unnecessary observations upon my lord’s conduct, which our friend did not, I could see, approve of, tho’ she purposely avoided taking notice of them but by a silent contempt.

Sir Charles either did not, or would not understand her carriage ; but as other company

THE MASQUERADE. 99

pany joined us he had no opportunity to be as particular as he wished to be.

When we came home lady Avon, not finding my lord, expressed much uneasiness about him, as Sedley, she said, had mentioned a quarrel; and indeed, the lady seemed to be warm. “Possibly, added Eudocia, these differences between them make him so unhappy: I cannot rest till I see him, continued she; and so, my dear, do sit up with me till he comes home.

He came not till it was very late; and then looked so dejected, and so wretched: yet discovered much surprise, and declared much concern at finding my lady up. — When she enquired after his health, he complained of an uncommon lowness of spirits; and when she renewed her enquiries the next day, he answered her with the same complaints. Our dear amiable friend felt a sincere compassion for his disquietude, and practised every little art she could think of to draw him out of the reveries into which he frequently fell, in which indeed

100 THE MASQUERADE.

he was almost every moment plunged.—She sung, she danced, she played, she read, by turns ; and all her endeavours to please were received as they deserved to be received, with the greatest tenderness.—She quite wearied herself to divert him ; and having sat up so late the night before, and not being in a condition to bear fatigue, she grew so restless that my lord, having prevailed on her to try to sleep, laid her on her sofa.

While she was reclined on the sofa, in came Sir Charles and Mrs. Minchin. The former seemed lost in admiration at the sight of my lady, and the latter fainted away upon her waking.—When she recovered my lord conducted her to her coach. During his absence Sir Charles, after having said a number of fine things to my lady, caught her hand, and was just going to put it to his lips, while she strove to withdraw it; when my lord returned, and appeared to be much alarmed at what he saw. Sir Charles pretended that he was only going
to

THE MASQUERADE. for

to try *her* ring upon *my* finger, and began to kiss my hand with violence—I, who saw thro' all his hypocrisy as well as my friend, became quite disgusted ; yet——But there can be no hopes of happiness with a man so full of deceit ; besides, if lord Avon, the fondest of all husbands, can follow other women when he has so unexceptionable a wife, how can *I* expect constancy in a husband ; and where is the man who may be depended upon ?

Mr. Mountney appears to be a man of strict honour ; but a man must have uncommon rectitude of heart, and be thoroughly able to conquer his passions, or the endowments of his mind will but partly recommend him ; at least, to *me*. No, my dear sister, I perceive, as I said before, that those who live free from any attachments but the attachments of friendship, have more reason to expect happiness. Yet even friendship will not exclude anxiety : and I believe I now feel for our dear friend more than she feels for herself.

102 THE MASQUERADE.

Lord Avon said, t'other day, that too much sensibility was a misfortune. I think I can readily subscribe to that opinion; and *you* will not, I trust, differ from me.

LETTER

LETTER XLIV.

Mr. MOUNTNEY to Lord AVON.

IN answer to your last, I reply, "Leave London immediately; and take your wife and family down to Devonshire, to Derbyshire, to any *shire*, if you do but fly from an artful woman who will not only do every thing in her power to set you against my lady, but will, most probably, make an attempt to seduce *her* also.—Your Eudocia is, I dare believe, unsullied at present in person and in mind; but take care to keep her so. The persuasions and example of one woman without principles do more mischief than the infamous arts of a thousand licentious men.—If you, therefore, wish to have your Eudocia remain uninfected, fly as soon as you receive this. Men, from being allowed to take greater liberties with their characters than women, (tho' he

certainly is the wisest and the happiest man who takes the fewest) contract a freedom of carriage which makes their designs soon known, and consequently puts the weaker sex—if you will allow of that expression—upon their guard against them : such a soft and subtle dissembler as Mrs. Minchin, not being suspected of having any ill intentions, will be the more successful in the execution of them—Besides, after such an *eclaircissement* as the *Ranelagh* evening produced, can it be supposed that my lady is ignorant of your attachment to the widow ? an attachment which will be more publicly known if you do not break it off.

With regard to Sedley, you have now an excellent pretence to drive him out of your house, which you may not have bye and bye : only oblige him to come to honourable terms with Olivia ; or tell him plainly, that his visits will be highly improper, and I fancy you will get rid of him ; you can but try, at least : besides, Olivia, from the friendship subsisting between her and lady

Avon,

THE MASQUERADE. 105

Avon, is intitled to your care about her peace and reputation. Olivia is a most amiable girl; and I heartily wish, for *her* sake, as well as my own, that Sedley may shuffle off, for he will make the devil of a husband.—Be speedy, however, and may success attend you.

F 5 LETTER

LETTER XLV.

Lord AVON to Mr. MOUNTNEY.

THE first part of your advice, my dear friend, I dare not attempt to follow. With what face can I insist upon my wife's going down to Devonshire, &c.—when I know that she hates the country; and when she has it in her power to turn the tables upon me, by upbraiding me for seeking to deprive her of her innocent amusements, while I take such frequent opportunities to indulge myself in guilty ones?—No, Mountney; I cannot think of laying any restraint on a dear creature, who still gives me the only joy I am capable of tasting.—I readily acknowledge the justness of what you say with regard to Mrs. Minchin; but would it be either reasonable or kind to suppose her to be loose and infamous, because

THE MASQUERADE. 107

cause she freely gives way to a passion for me?

You imagine that our affair is become public : I cannot be of *your* opinion ; for surely my wife would never treat me with so much complacency, if she knew my connexions with Mrs. Minchin, whom she looks upon as her friend ; and whom, for that very reason, I must endeavour to keep quiet. I do assure you, however, that I will, notwithstanding, take the first opportunity to shake her off entirely.

As to Sedley, there is no stirring him.— I have talked to him *very* seriously about Olivia ; and told him he must be sensible that his flirting with her could not but be highly disadvantageous to her : adding, that unless he made proper proposals to Mr. Heber, he must not be either surprised or offended, if I was positively determined no longer to see the friend of my wife, so amiable a girl too, affronted by a pretended attachment to her.

108 THE MASQUERADE.

What answer do you think the rogue returned ?

“ I never was more serious since I was born, than in my addressee to Miss Olivia Heber, and design to write to her father as soon as I can get her to determine absolutely in my favour. *That* determination I have been all along waiting for.”

As I could not believe a single syllable of this reply, I told Olivia, the first time I saw her alone, what steps I had taken with Sir Charles ; assuring her, that as I looked upon her under my protection, while she was in *my* house ; in consequence of my Eudocia's friendship for her, and of the high opinion I had of her merit, I thought such a proceeding quite necessary ; hoping, at the same time, that she approved of what I had done on *her* account.

Her face and neck were like scarlet while I was speaking ; and when I stopped, she said that she was extremely obliged to me for the honour I had done her. She then,

THE MASQUERADE. 109

then, with a low curtsy, left the room, to hide her emotions, I imagine; for she trembled, and tears rushed into her eyes.— If Sedley should be honest, at last, there will be no hopes for *you*.

LETTER

110 THE MASQUERADE.

LETTER XLVI.

SIR CHARLES SEDLEY TO COL. ACKWORTH.

I DON'T like the appearance of things just now.—Why should Avon monopolize all the women who are tolerable?

I have been more and more enamoured with my lady since *that* delicious evening; and my lord seems more and more determined to keep me at a distance. Why, the devil, can't he be content with Mrs. Minchin, and the freedoms to which he has a right, as a husband, with his lovely wife? why must he presume to forbid my seeing Olivia, except I will come to the point? This behaviour is intolerable—I never was half so inclined to quarrel with a man in all my life, as I was with lord Avon, on this very subject: but instantly considering, that I must then expect to find his doors always shut to me; and that my
lady,

THE MASQUERADE. 115

lady, out of decency, could not well speak to me in public, I bridled my anger, and promised to write to old Heber, as soon as I could get his daughter's consent.—And faith, now 'tis come to the push, said I to myself, I may as well marry the girl as not.—Tho' I hate marriage like the devil, 'tis probable I may not be able to avoid it all my life; and Olivia is, to be sure, the right sort of girl to make a wife of—Besides, I shall then, of course, see my lady continually, and opportunities may offer in such a situation, which I never could have hoped for in any other. As the husband of her dearest friend, I shall, undoubtedly, have some right to expect a share of her confidence; and then my little Olivia, my own fond girl, will not have the power of concealing her friend's most secret thoughts from me.—I shall know, to a scruple, how well she likes Avon; and when she is in humour with him, and when not: as a wife must be a strange animal indeed, who can suffer her husband to pass night after night with

112 THE MASQUERADE.

with his mistress, without wishing to make reprisals.

Having raised the most delicious expectations of watching the critical moment to catch her ladyship's virtue nodding, with my heart beating high with hope, I hurried to Olivia; and in the softest, prettiest terms I could devise, declared my intention to demand her, in form, of her good father.

'Sdeath and furies!——The little gipsy absolutely rejected me.

I was actually struck all of a heap with amazement; and could not, for a considerable time, find words to ask the meaning of so unaccountable a proceeding. Surely I am sufficiently acquainted with women, not to be mistaken in all the signs she discovered of her wishes: not to mention the offer itself, which was too flattering to be refused by the daughter of a meer country gentleman, who could give her only a few paltry *bundreds*.

You

THE MASQUERADE. 113

You can't think, George, what a confounded silly figure I made, when I first appeared upon this d—d honourable business:—But to be taken in by a little rustic, who has not been much above three months in town—Oh! how I cursed myself for an egregious coxcomb! — Baffled, however, as I was, I had no mind to let her slip quite thro' my fingers: and, tho' I felt something like indifference all over me, which a good deal chilled the ardor of my approaches, I with much ado stammered out, “ You really surprize me, madam, beyond measure, by this unexpected treatment.”

My dainty gentlewoman replied,—(curse her)—“ I hope and believe I *do* surprize you, Sir Charles; as I should be sorry to have a man of *your* principles imagine, that he could marry me when he pleased.”

My principles! — And pray how came the pretty moppet so well acquainted with my

114 THE MASQUERADE.

my principles ?—’Sdeath ! that Mountney must have been prating.

I wished him to come in that moment : I believe I should have demanded satisfaction of him.—However, I stifled my passion as well as I could, and began to whine out something about cruel disappointment, misrepresentations, and such stuff, hoping to melt her to my purpose, and to be even with my gentlewoman and her principles ; when, to my utter confusion, she very calmly walked out of the room, leaving me to entertain myself with reflections on my first honourable overtures, which were not of the most agreeable kind.

Is not ~~this~~ a very extraordinary affair ? who would have expected this tame pigeon, in appearance, to be so intolerable a flirt, so consummate a jilt ?—a meer country girl, bred nobody knows where—in Pool’s-Hole—in the Peak.—The devil take her for me.—These northern wenches would outwit old Lucifer himself — and yet what a soft, sighing simpleton to look at ! Accord-

THE MASQUERADE. 115

ing to the Italian proverb, George, a woman and a melon are never to be known by their outsides.—But Olivia shall pay for her airs; aye, and her fine friend too—I expected *her* to be a tartar.—I own I am confoundedly bit *here*, to be outwitted by such a meer doll.—She can have no sensations.

LETTER

116 THE MASQUERADE.

LETTER XLVII.

Lady AVON to Miss HEBER.

OLIVIA, my dear friend, not being in spirits, has desired me to inform you, that she has positively refused Sir Charles Sedley's request, with regard to making proposals to our good Mr. Heber. But tho' she has acted with great discretion, I am but too much afraid, that her discretion will be attended with the most painful sensations. I hope, however, that a more intimate acquaintance with Sir Charles's character will restore that tranquility to her mind, which she enjoyed before she knew him. I am charmed, I confess, with the proper spirit she has shewn upon this occasion, in her behaviour to a man who has no idea of domestic happiness: with such a man what woman can be happy?

Don't

THE MASQUERADE. 117

Don't you laugh at my sentiments ? I almost smile at them myself ; and yet they are really my own, tho' so like those which my lord entertained a little while ago, that they may be readily mistaken for *his*.—And yet I have not the slightest reason to complain of any change in my lord's carriage to me : but I think that he can, as well as myself, find amusement *from home*.

Olivia and I have had a little friendly debate. She was, at her first giving up Sir Charles, in a fit of despair, ready to set out for Derbyshire ;—but I, at length, made her sensible, that it will be infinitely more prudent for her to remain here, upon my account as well as her own :—Were she to quit the town just now, would not Sir Charles most probably say, that tho' she had refused him, she was still so much attached to him in her heart, as not to dare to trust herself with the sight of him ? and would not the world, ever censorious, ever seeking for opportunities to traduce the most innocent,

118 THE MASQUERADE.

nocent, throw out malicious hints, that her retreat, after she had been so much seen in public with a man of his character, might be owing to the necessity of concealing the effects of an irregular correspondence between them?—Let her, therefore, my dear Alicia, remain here, and triumph over this vain coxcomb, who has, I fear, triumphed over but too many of our silly sex.—Besides, what would Mountney do for her?—I am sure he loves her; and time may, perhaps, make her sensible of his merit.

The dear good girl is not well—but be not anxious; every thing shall be done to restore the health and peace of my kindest friend:—She, with every thing else I ought to say to you from her, wishes to hear where Edmund is, and how you bear his absence?

We are to go every day to Richmond for the benefit of the air, and sometimes to sleep there; as the physicians think our dear Olivia may be relieved by it.

LETTER

Sir

C

have
able
migh
dear
ent w

"A

On

dear;

"H

her for

Und

underst

second:

all diffi

Most

"A

THE MASQUERADE. 119

L E T T E R XLVIII.

Sir CHARLES SEDLEY to Col. ACKWORTH.

COURAGE ! Once more I launch my bark upon the uncertain ocean. I have contracted an intimacy with the agreeable Mrs. Minchin, and find her to be a mighty necessary woman. She has, like a dear ingenious devil, thought of an expedient which must infallibly succeed—

“ Ay, what’s that ? ”

Only a new lover for lady Avon, my dear ; that’s all.”

“ How ?—I thought you wanted to gain her for yourself.”

Undoubtedly—But, I am not nice—you understand me : I shall be contented to be *second* : when she has once broken the ice, all difficulties will be over.

Most of the sex love variety.

“ Another and another after that.”

And

120 THE MASQUERADE.

And lady Avon is indisputably fond of general admiration : yet, there must be a beginning.

Mrs. Minchin tells me, I am not the right sort of man.

“ You are too volatile, too negligent to win a woman so universally followed. The man who gains *her* must be a downright serious fighter ; he must be in earnest.”

“ I swear, my dear widow, that I never was more earnest, more serious in my life.”

“ But you are too indiscriminate a lover : you flirt with all without distinction ; and tho’ many women like such an agreeable carelessness, this lady Avon expects something more ; and the most assiduous attention, the tenderest solicitude will, in her opinion, be too little, unless the man appears to be actually dying for her. My lord, at my request, related to me all that passed between him and his wife when she was Miss Tameworth ; and therefore I am perfectly acquainted with her humour.”

“ And

IN
her
lon
“
len
fici
quie
T
I
with
He i
He v
at th
thing
to in
very
he lef
out a
wards
is ver
handso
It is
to mak
VOL.

THE MASQUERADE. 121

“ And where will she find this expiring INAMORATO? for tho’ every man admires her, few men have patience to hold out a long siege.

“ Don’t frighten yourself about the length of the siege; let the attack be sufficiently warm, and I’ll answer for the quickness of the capitulation.”

Thus ended our dialogue.

I have within two days become intimate with lord Melville, just arrived from Italy. He is, you will allow, a compleat *Adonis*.—He was so charmed with her t’other night at the opera, that he could attend to nothing but her beauty; and I have promised to introduce him. He says, that he was very well acquainted with lord Ayon before he left England; and may therefore, without any impropriety, make overtures towards the renewal of their intimacy; but is very desirous of being spoken of in handsome terms to my lady.

It is, you know, Mrs. Minchin’s interest to make lord Melville a favourite.—This

122 THE MASQUERADE.

has a face; and I shall watch them pretty closely. He is young, striking in his person, and has sense—(A fine woman takes an infinite deal of pleasure, you know, in making a man of understanding a fool.)—Besides, he will manage matters better with Avon than I did : I was an honest, open-hearted rascal, and let my friend see that I had a mind to his wife : but lord Melville is one of your speculative men of pleasure ; he will, presently, make her sensible that he takes notice of nothing but *her* ; and yet will behave in such a manner as to prevent his designs from being discovered, particularly by Avon, who, as he is uncommonly suspicious, ought to have more eyes than ideas.

Now, I think, I shall be even with these two pretty friends ; for the fall of Eudocia will so far affect Olivia, that she won't, I'll bet any sum, hold out long after her.

LETTER

La
N
when
spare
Tam
to ca
sembl
fifty i
pen t
her f
amply
terrup

"To

THE MASQUERADE. 123

LETTER XLIX.

Lady AVON to Miss OLIVIA HEBER, at
Richmond.

Grosvenor Square.

NOT being able to come down to you, according to my first intention when I left you yesterday, but having a spare half hour, while I wait for lady Tameworth, and Mrs. Minchin, who are to call on me to go to Mrs. Counter's assembly, I had snatched up my pen to say fifty idle things, (out of which, if five happen to divert my dear Olivia, and hinder her from thinking too deeply, I shall be amply rewarded,) when lord Melville interrupted me;

“ — adorn'd with ev'ry art
“ To warm and win the coldest heart ;”

124 THE MASQUERADE.

He rushed into the room, and, upon my word, made many soft speeches, in no bad style; and yet said nothing that amounted to the direct mention of what I neither ought to hear, nor am desirous of hearing. I find, however, that I must keep him at a great distance.

“He comes too late who comes to be denied.”

He was insinuating beyond expression; and tho’ I am sure I never can prefer any man to my dear lord Avon, notwithstanding the whispers which have come to my ears about him, I don’t like to be thus continually pursued by a man who is certainly too amiable to be suffered to be particular. I was disgusted at Sedley’s freedoms; but tho’ he is infinitely a worse man than lord Melville, his lordship is a far more dangerous one. Sedley, by flirting with every woman, makes himself of no consequence to any:—but Melville only attaches himself

THE MASQUERADE. 125

self to me ; and with so much artful deference that I don't like his behaviour.

I was sorry to be alone with him, and sat listening for lady Tameworth's coach ; wishing every moment to hear it stop.

My lord finding himself disregarded, said, with a gentle sigh, " May I venture to ask you, madam, what so engrosses your thoughts ? When I first came in those lovely features were gay with smiles, but they were suddenly overcast : Have I, charming lady Avon, (continued he, stealing his hand in mine) been so unfortunate as to say any thing to displease you ? If I have, I willingly submit to the most rigorous punishment which you can inflict : I would forfeit my life rather than offend you."

So mighty soft a speech merited, no doubt, in his opinion, as gentle a reply ; but I almost threw him out of his play by answering, with the most unconcerned vivacity, " Indeed, my lord, so far was I from thinking about what you were saying,

126 THE MASQUERADE.

that I did not so much as hear it, expecting every moment some friends to call for me in their coach."

A most expressive sigh, accompanied with a very dying look, seemed to be the forerunners of a second excellent speech; so that I began to wish in good earnest to get rid of him.—

Luckily, at that instant in came my lord; —in search of Mrs. Minchin, I suppose.

He started at the sight of Melville's attitude, who sat leaning on the back of my chair; and, tho' I had withdrawn my hand twenty times, had just seized it again.

My suspicious Harry changed colour: he looked absolutely frightened.—He may love Mrs. Minchin, but I am sure he loves *me* better: and while that is the case, I can neither be jealous of him, nor angry with him, tho' I saw plainly that he was fired both with jealousy, and angry on seeing *me* so attended.

I, therefore, rose from my seat, went up to him, and told him of my engagement,

THE MASQUERADE. 127

ment, of which he certainly knew as well I did ; and asked him if he was not to be of our party ?

Surveying lord Melville, who had very politely spoken to him at his entrance, all over ; and then looking at me, he said, “ I did not intend to go, but if you will stay till I am drest”—

He then rang the bell. Bingley came in, and he ordered his things to be got ready.

Ringin' again, he countermanded them immediately.

In came Mr. Mountney. At the sight of him he expressed the highest satisfaction ; and yet, before he gave Mountney time to answer him, said, “ Will you stay here while I drest ?”

“ If you make haste, possibly I may,” replied he in his blunt manner.

“ 'Pshaw, *possibly* won't do, said my lord peevishly : you must promise to stay here with lady Avon till I come down.”

128 THE MASQUERADE.

Mountney assured him, with a smile, that he would.—He, therefore, left us at last, tho' visibly much agitated on account of lord Melville.

Mountney told me, that his chief business was to see you.—He called you a noble girl; expressed a tender concern for your indisposition; and asked *my* permission to see you at Richmond.

I shall bring him to you, Olly; he merits your esteem—I was glad that my lord had prevailed on him to remain with me; but I saw that Melville was sorry, tho' he treated Mountney with the most flattering regard.

At last, lady Tameworth came in without Mrs. Minchin, who had apologized for her absence, by pleading a violent head-ach.

My lord made his appearance again, dressed still more elegantly than Melville was, to whom my discreet aunt offered a corner in her coach.

My lord, who handed lady Tameworth, let her go to run after us, in order to
see

THE MASQUERADE. 129

see that no improprieties passed between us.

Mountney shook his head at lord Avon, and asked him if he would trust *him* to wait on me to Richmond to-morrow. My lord, I know, can't be of our party *now*; for if he disappoints Mrs. Minchin to-night, he must stay and make it up with her.

I sat up after I came home to conclude this letter : because I am to go to the new tragedy to-morrow. — I cannot, therefore, come to see you till the next day.

Take care of your health, my Olivia, and look kindly upon Mountney.

L E T T E R L.

Mr. MOUNTNEY to Lord AVON.

YOU are so everlastingly engaged *now*, that there is no finding a moment to speak to you: I wished to give you a little more advice on the night I found lord Melville at *your* house: I saw your disturbance; but you only made yourself laughed at—You should at once have secured Eudocia to yourself, by giving up a woman who has seduced *you*, and who is also trying to seduce *her*. I am assured, no matter how I came by my intelligence, that Mrs. Minchin, eager to keep you entirely to herself, has instigated lord Melville to endeavour to make lady Avon sensible that he has the tenderest passion for her; which passion is discoverable in the strongest manner, by every look and gesture: he adores, he doats on her, I know he does; and yet
he

THE MASQUERADE. 131

he will try never to offend her. Such a man, if any person besides yourself can, is the most likely to touch her heart.—You may fancy, perhaps, that she is too lively and volatile; but she has, nevertheless, a heart naturally tender and compassionating.—Leave Mrs. Minchin, therefore, for ever: my lady's heart is firmly your's at present; and you may keep it if you will supply the place of this amiable man,—but not more amiable than *you* are.—Again, I say, take my lady down to Devonshire: Richmond is too near London.—Take notice, Avon, I give advice directly contrary to my own interest; for you must take Olivia with you.

The dear, gentle, suffering girl received me with blushes, which convinced me how much she has felt for Sedley. She is exceedingly altered.—She put me in mind of Shakespeare's VIOLA, who sat

———like patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief.

132 THE MASQUERADE.

Mild and tender, however, as her disposition is, she will never, I fear, be brought to any thing but a bare *endurance* of me.— But I think more about your affairs than my own. — Prithee don't feel reluctance, any longer, at parting with a woman, who deserves not even your pity, much less your love.—Resolve, like a man, never to see her again.

LETTER

THE MASQUERADE. 133

LETTER LI.

MISS HEBER to MISS OLIVIA HEBER.

HOW sincerely I congratulate you, my dear Olivia, upon the conquest you have gained over your inclination, which, by what I have heard from our dear lady Avon and yourself, could never have been indulged without the highest indiscretion! Yet how can I sit on judgment on others, when my own conduct wants an apology. —Why am I so exceedingly anxious about a man, who, tho' very amiable, may never have it in his power to make proposals to me to which I ought to listen, supposing him desirous of making the most eligible ones?

He has been for some time perpetually with me; but, a few days ago, he informed me that his father was going to send him to stay with *the friend* with whom he had

134 THE MASQUERADE.

had lately been on a visit, one of the most agreeable men in the world. "I should feel an uncommon pleasure in being with him, continued he, if I could enjoy his company without being separated from my Alicia."

My face glowed : I hung my head. Reflecting that I was going to lose him, perhaps, for ever, my heart was filled with sorrow, and my eyes with tears.

He saw my confusion and my distress, and taking my hand, which he gently pressed, said, "Do not be uneasy, my dear Miss Heber : I will never, a single moment, forget the regard you have shewn for me ; and will dare to hope, if you forbid me not to hope, that no happier man shall usurp the place which I hold, I flatter myself, in that dear friendly bosom.—I will not, however, take leave of you till the last instant.—Be comforted ; and be assured, that my gratitude will never suffer me to be unmindful of you."

He

THE MASQUERADE. 135

He left me in tears : and when he came to take his last adieu, they flowed so fast, that I could not speak to him.

He clasped me in his arms ; he kissed me tenderly — he never had taken that liberty before — and was, apparently, full as much concerned as myself.

“ Dear Alicia ! ” cried he, “ how it afflicts me to leave you thus ! Were I not under controul, I would stay with you for ever.”

I was only capable of making a reply with a modest pressure of his hand, while my looks must have sufficiently acquainted him with every emotion of my too tender heart.

I comfort myself chiefly, in his absence, by talking of him to my father, by strolling to the walks he loved, and sitting on the bench on which I have spent so many pleasing hours by his side. — But how foolish is it, in this manner, to cherish an inclination, the indulgence of which can only make me wretched !

My

136 THE MASQUERADE.

My father has received an offer for me, which he thinks a very advantageous one, and which very few girls in my situation would refuse. — My new lover is a young man of fashion. His uncle applied to my father by letter; and my father has assured me, that the gentleman, whom he has seen, is quite as agreeable as Edmund.—He may be so: I wish I could see with my father's eyes, if, by seeing like him, I could make him happier. But were this so highly-commended lover even handsomer, more amiable, and richer than he is—still—still—he is not Edmund.

My father, however, is very good; he only laughed at my peremptory refusal, told me I was a simpleton, and added that I should repent of what I had done. But, certainly, next to marrying the man you like, the only satisfaction is not to be obliged to marry any body who is your aversion. Is not my dear Olivia of this opinion?

I ap-

THE MASQUERADE. 137

I approve of our dear friend's reasons for keeping you near her ; but can't help wishing, that this place had been fixed upon as the properest to promote your recovery : How particularly suitable should we *now* be to each other ! Yet, on second thoughts, the solitude of the country, perhaps, added to the melancholy society of a sister, whose heart is still more deeply engaged than your own, might only serve to make you think the oftener on the man, whom you wish totally to forget.—To forget those whom we love is—I know by experience—a painful task indeed !

LETTER

L E T T E R LII.

Lord MELVILLE to Mrs. MINCHIN.

YOU have put me upon too hard a service, madam.—To *pretend* a passion only for lady Avon is impossible ; I feel it all over me — every nerve trembles at the sight of her, even at a distance : but when I, either by accident or design, approach near enough to touch her, no words can describe the emotions of my soul. She is really the most lovely woman I ever beheld ; and, as I firmly believe her to be as good as she is beautiful, how can I venture even to think of injuring such an angel, or of endeavouring to inspire her with a passion which must make her injure both herself and my lord, who is a very amiable man, and whom I am sure she loves. Had you but seen her last night, on his coming home unexpected ; had you seen her eyes sparkling

THE MASQUERADE. 139

ling with pleasure at his entrance, you would have been sensible, that it will be no easy matter for me to gain her from him, supposing I was so lost to honour, as to attempt such a conquest.

Upon my declaring my admiration of this charming woman, you told me that she had a husband undeserving of her, and wished that I would feign a passion for her, in order to make him return to his duty.—I felt myself but too strongly inclined to comply with your desire: but my compliance has destroyed my peace.—She proves to be a woman, not only superior to any of her sex with whom I have ever conversed, but, to my everlasting disquiet, the only woman who can make me happy. She has fired me with love, but she has also filled me with a kind of veneration for her, which no other woman ever excited in me. That delightful vivacity, which her envious rivals, the conceited coxcombs who flutter round her, or the adoring husband, (who, knowing the value of the treasure he possesses,

140 THE MASQUERADE.

esses, trembles lest another should deprive him of it) call levity or coquetry, is nothing but the innocent transport of a heart replete with virtuous sensations.—Would to Heaven I had never known her! it being impossible for me, at present, to subdue a passion, which, as it can never be returned, must be the torment of my life.—I shall, therefore, soon give up the satisfaction I now enjoy of being near her, to ensure my future tranquility.

With my most grateful acknowledgments to Mrs. Minchin, for having procured me so delightful, but, at the same time, so dangerous an acquaintance,

I am

her very obedient,

humble servant,

MELVILLE.

LETTER

THE MASQUERADE. 141

LETTER LIII.

Lady AVON to Miss OLIVIA HEBER.

IAM very sorry, my dear friend, to find that neither your health nor your inclination would permit you to leave Richmond the day before yesterday, and come with me to town : yet, as you received no injury from going to the play the other evening, you might have, methinks, ventured again. Your company is quite necessary to me now ; for I must be either with Mrs. Minchin or lord Melville, or both ; and they are both, you know, improper as well as disagreeable people to be about me.—The former, by some indiscretions discovered in my lord's presence, has left me no room to entertain a doubt concerning their intimacy ; but I don't chuse to take any notice of it, being fearful of displeasing my lord. I would not, willingly, disgust him,

142 THE MASQUERADE.

him, Olivia : he still loves me ; and he will, possibly, in time, become tired of Mrs. Minchin, with the freedom of whose behaviour he is, I see pretty plainly, offended ; and he, I believe, sincerely wishes that I was not a witness to it. If you were here, Olly, she might, perhaps, be more reserved. She looks upon *you* as a vestal. — Now, why must people suppose that a married woman should be less modest than a maid ? If I was a man, I should prefer a woman who was the most *decent* in her carriage, and all men of sense do so.

I am certain that my lord, at this time, would like Mrs. Minchin better if she was more reserved, especially before *me*. But this is not all which disturbs me : she is perpetually crying up lord Melville, and as perpetually making him of our parties. She has even had the address, I think, to make lord Avon, who was, at first, not less suspicious of him than of other people, quite easy and satisfied with his being continually

THE MASQUERADE. 143

tinually with me, and frequently with me alone.

Melville indeed is at present only mighty soft and civil: he is, undoubtedly, a man of sense and conversation; but still a third person would make our society more agreeable to me, and less censurable. Come, then, my dear, to town, or I must e'en immure myself with *you* at Richmond.

Mountney has called on us, and wishes to see you. He advises me to make a resolution to stay at Richmond: but then I shall have Mrs. Minchin for a constant visiter, as she will not leave my lord, who has no mind to leave *me*; Melville, too, will pretend to come after *her*; and they are certainly more bearable for a few hours in a day, than they would be if shut up in a house with one. Let me prevail on you, therefore, to come, if your health will permit, to Grosvenor-square.

LETTER

L E T T E R L I V .

Lord AVON to Mr. MOUNTNEY.

MY conscience reproaches me but too severely with my fatal connexion with Harriot, to suffer me to make the least resistance to my Eudocia's inclinations, which keep her, I know, at this very moment in London, tho' her dear Olivia is confined at Richmond for the benefit of the air, and wishes for her society.

As to Melville, I believe he admires my wife,—every man must admire her—I should indeed be more pleased if he was not so eternally at her elbow: Mrs. Minchin, however, assures me, and she is too firmly mine to deceive me, that he is a very discreet young fellow, and may be trusted. I never observed him, 'tis true, to be in the least disposed to attempt such monstrous freedoms as Sedley has taken:

nor

THE MASQUERADE. 145

nor do I, tho' I think Eudocia virtuous, imagine that she likes him a quarter so well; consequently there is less danger.

As to breaking off with Mrs. Minchin, I have endeavoured to do it twenty times.— I am thoroughly convinced of my wife's infinite superiority; but there is such a melting tenderness in Harriot, whenever she has the slightest suspicion of my designing to quit her, that it distresses me beyond all endurance. She loves me with an ardor so intense, so extravagant, that she can hardly keep her passion within bounds; and I have, actually, been more than once terrified lest my dear Eudocia should guess something of which she is certainly ignorant, as she could not possibly be so calm, unless she has quite ceased to love me.— There is no visible alteration in her carriage, she is neither more nor less fond of me. While I was distracted on my first intimacy with Harriot, she, indeed, from pity, discovered more than common affection; but there is now no-

VOL. II. H thing

146 THE MASQUERADE.

thing particular in her behaviour to me one way or the other.—Had I been able to raise the passion of jealousy in her heart, she must have given some proofs of it ere now : but I fear she will ever be insensible, at least to me. Could she but doat like Harriot!——What an ecstatic thought!

LETTER

I
pr
I v
we
M
wi
wi
do
ney
opp
gin
at L
ciffe
whi
N
leav

THE MASQUERADE. 147

LETTER LV.

Lady AVON to Miss OLIVIA HEBER.

I SHALL be with you the day after to-morrow, my dear, as soon as I have prepared every thing for leaving town.— I will stay no longer here. When we meet we will contrive some method to keep Mrs. Minchin, if possible, from absolutely living with us : and if we cannot carry our point without displeasing my lord, we will go down at once to Derbyshire, to which journey he will not, now, I believe, make any opposition.

As to lord Melville, he will not, I imagine, at present venture to pay many visits at Richmond ; as there has been an *eclaircissement* relating to him, the particulars of which you shall hear when we meet.

Mountney has teased me to death to leave London before ; but I had my rea-

148 THE MASQUERADE.

sons for staying so long, tho' I did not think proper to communicate them to *him*.

Shall I own to you, Olivia, that I cannot bear the thoughts of Richmond, while my lord is here; and I am apprehensive that, tho' he still loves me, Mrs. Minchin will either get him from me to town, or come to Richmond after him.

As you will see me so soon, I shall make no apology for the shortness of this.

LETTER

LETTER LVI.

Lord MELVILLE to Mrs. MINCHIN.

TIS all over with me. I have spoken, and I am undone. I flattered myself, in vain, that I could see her without increasing a passion which grew too violent to be concealed.

I have already told you, that I would cease going to a house in which I should be in so dangerous a situation; but I had not power to keep off. Had I, indeed, withdrawn myself entirely from lord Avon's, I must necessarily have met with his charming wife at every public place. Yet, I believe, I should not have risked the giving her offence, had not fortune last night laid a strong temptation before me.

We were both at *Soho*, but in different parties—I could not help presenting myself

H 3

to

150 THE MASQUERADE.

to take care of her out—The horses, being frightened at something, ran away with the coach : I ran swiftly after it, in order to stop them, and was happy enough to accomplish my design, tho' several people about me were unsuccessful in their attempts. My lady, however, being very much alarmed, I could not think of letting her go home by herself, as I knew that the lady, who was with her, was to be set down in George-street, Hanover-square.—I therefore, almost without asking her leave, stepped into the coach to them : but, having been shocked lest lady Avon's fright should be attended with disagreeable consequences, I did not, till just before we stopped in George-street, endeavour to make her sensible, that I thought it very unsafe for her to go home by herself.

She made no answer.

When I had conducted her into her own house, she looked so pale that I was affected beyond expression ; tho' I believe I appeared

THE MASQUERADE. 151

peared still more disordered myself. I was, indeed, in such an agitation concerning her health, that I scarce knew either what I said or did.

On her first coming in, I insisted upon her taking some drops, and fain would have persuaded her to suffer a surgeon to be fetched, to bleed her.

She absolutely persisted in refusing me ; but her refusal was accompanied with a heavenly smile, which seemed to compassionate me for my restless anxiety.

I could hold out no longer.

Seizing her lovely hand, I pressed it in mine : I even dared to advance it to my lips ; begging her, at the same time, to tell me how she found herself, and to excuse the wildness, the distraction of my behaviour, which my excessive terrors on her account had occasioned.

She withdrew her hand instantly ; and darted a look at me, which not only reprimanded me severely for my presumption,

H 4

but

152 THE MASQUERADE.

but made me tremble lest I had committed an offence never to be pardoned. I was almost petrified by her awful yet alluring frowns.

At first I thought of leaving her immediately, after having desired her permission to come the next day to see how she did ; but the dread of being denied so transporting a satisfaction kept me in a most perplexed and wavering state.

At last, no longer able to endure either her coolness and indifference, or my own disquieting sensations, I threw myself at her feet, and besought her with the tenderest, the most pathetic earnestness, to pardon me for every thing I had said or done, assuring her that I would never offend again—and adding, that I should not then have discovered the passion which I had felt for her from my first acquaintance with her, had not my terrors about her safety made me involuntarily give a vent to emotions I had not power to controul.

“ For-

THE MASQUERADE. 153

“Forgive but this first offence, madam, concluded I; and I solemnly swear that you shall never have reason to be displeased with me.”

I was silent—but I lifted up my supplicating eyes to her dear enchanting face, waiting for her answer.

Rising immediately, she, with a voice and look which rooted me to the floor, said, “I had hoped, Sir, that my being the wife of lord Ayon would have secured me from the hearing of such very improper declarations; as I am perfectly assured, that I never, intentionally, gave any man room to imagine that I could be brought to listen to them. Leave this house, therefore, instantly, my lord: you have more than repaid yourself for the service you have done me, by taking a liberty which no man, but yourself, ever attempted.”

With these chilling words she left the room abruptly, before I could recover my-

154 THE MASQUERADE.

self enough to reply. I was, indeed, so shocked at her anger, while I allowed it to be just, that I was scarce able to rise from the attitude I was in.

At that instant my lord entered the room.

He seemed to be much surprised, and not at all pleased, to find me in his house at so late an hour.

As soon as I could articulate, I acquainted him with the affair that had brought me to the spot on which he saw me.

He returned no answer, but flew up stairs after my lady; and I, astonished at a carriage so destitute of politeness, but which was nothing compared to what had happened, hurried out of a house in which I had suffered so much uneasiness.

Not daring to appear before lady Avon again, yet still desirous, beyond expression, to know if she had received no harm from her fright, I sent as soon as I thought she might be awake.

The

THE MASQUERADE. 155

The porter answered, without sending my compliments up stairs, that my lady was very well.

I send you this, madam, that you may intercede for me when you see my lady, as I cannot venture to appear myself. Tell her, my dear Mrs. Minchin, that when I offended her, I offended her involuntarily, at an unguarded moment, when I was abandoned to despair at her situation, which for ever debarred me even of the most distant hopes; and when I was trembling with a thousand fears for her safety: overpowered by those fears, I was too much affected to behave with that respectful deference, which her discretion had ever exacted from me; and the failure, of which I have been guilty, will for ever destroy my peace, unless she can be prevailed on, by being assured that it was not an intentional one, and would never be repeated, to condescend to forgive me.—Say this, my good friend; say any thing else that you

H 6

think

156 THE MASQUERADE.

think more proper, or more likely to move
this angel of a woman to relent and to par-
don; and you will eternally oblige

your ever obedient,

MELVILLE.

LETTER

V
pri
har
of i
I
my
I co
tho
cept
tlem
but,
with
sent.
A
my
mori

THE MASQUERADE. 157

LETTER LVII.

MISS HEBER TO MISS OLIVIA HEBER.

WHAT intelligence have I to send you, my dear sister! It will surprise you, I dare say; for I myself could hardly, for some time, believe the reality of it.

I told you in my last of an offer which my father had received for me, and which I could no way bring myself to accept of; tho' he very much pressed me to the acceptance of it, and painted the young gentleman in the most advantageous colours: but, after Edmund, he had no chance, with all his accomplishments, for my consent.

At last, my father, seemingly tired with my repeated refusals, said to me, one morning, at breakfast, "Well, girl; since
you

158 THE MASQUERADE.

you still persist in opposing me, we will see what you will say to your friend Edmund, who is quite intimate with this lover of your's; and who, at his request, is coming to see what *he* can do with you."

At the sudden mention of the dear youth who engrossed all my thoughts, and for whom indeed I had rejected all the offers made to me, whom I had wished to see, but whose return I had not ventured to expect so soon, my face was in a glow—my fingers trembled to such a degree, that I was obliged to set down my cup—tears started into my eyes, and I eagerly said, without considering to whom I spoke, "Can Edmund then desire to persuade me to be miserable? can he, who wished that no happier man might usurp his place in my heart; can he—ought he to plead for his friend?"

"How?" interrupted my father, "have you then engaged yourself to Edmund, without *my* consent, and kept your engagement all this while from my knowledge?"

"No,

THE MASQUERADE. 159

“No, indeed, my dear Sir,” said I, weeping; “he never made any proposal, he never declared any thing but friendship.”

“Friendship!” replied my father; “the girl’s a fool to talk such nonsense—Indeed Alcey, I thought you had been wiser than not to know, that when young men propose themselves as friends, they always mean something more than friendship.”—Then—as if recollecting himself—“However, added he, I charge you, as you value my affection, to consent to marry the friend of Edmund, and don’t let your head run upon impossibilities.”

You can’t think, my dear sister, how I was surprized and confounded at what my father told me.—The more I endeavoured to discover the meaning of a behaviour which I thought so unaccountable both in him and young Hastings, the more I was puzzled to find it out. I grew very impatient, however, to see the latter; not doubting but that he would give me immediately

160 THE MASQUERADE.

mediately the information which I so earnestly wished for : Yet I was still more firmly resolved than ever not to marry ; as I found that, notwithstanding Edmund's readiness to give me up to his friend, he monopolized my heart, and that I could not think of letting any other man have the least share of it.

He arrived in about an hour.

Instead of rising, in order to run to him, as I used to do after ever so short an absence, I sat motionless with my handkerchief up to my eyes.

He flew to me ; and with a look and voice expressive of tenderness and surprize, cried, " Am I then mistaken in you, my dear Alicia ? and have I reckoned too much upon your esteem, by expecting to be received by you as a lover, as the man who wished to be your's for ever, and who could not help believing that you would see him, at least, with satisfaction, and not behold him with tears ?"

" I do

THE MASQUERADE. 161

“ I do not understand you, Edmund,” said I, with a feeble and faltering voice, so violent was the tremor all over me; “ you talk of *one* thing, and my father of *another*. He told me that you was coming to recommend a friend of your’s to me,—and I assure you, at once, I cannot marry him—indeed I cannot.”

I could not go on : sighs and sobs quite hindered me from speaking.

“ Be composed, my dear Alicia,” said he; “ tho’ I cannot be so if you still reject me.—I have no friend to recommend but myself—I always esteemed you highly, and since the affecting pity which you discovered for me when I lost all hopes of Eudocia, my heart fondly told me, that you were not altogether indifferent about me. I would, at that time, have declared my sentiments, but I was not my own master; and my uncle, to whom I am indebted for my education — (for he is not my father) told me that I had a father who would one day own me; adding, that till *he* made his
ap-

162 THE MASQUERADE.

appearance I must not offer to dispose of myself. I obeyed, tho' with reluctance, because I earnestly wished to tell you what would, I could not help believing, give you pleasure. Our parting, you may remember, was affecting, which made me the more ready to imagine that you were not averse to me; and I left you with uncommon regret, extremely unwilling to quit a house in which I had always been received with particular satisfaction. You may remember too, Alicia, that I wished you not to be prepossessed in favour of any other man—I dared not to say any more.—The friend whom I went to visit proved to be my father, Sir Edmund Hastings: he had till then taken the name of Thompson, being afraid to own his marriage, tho' my mother had been dead some years, while his father lived, as there had been differences between the two families, which never could be accommodated. My uncle (who was acquainted with my father's private marriage) losing his only son, an infant,

THE MASQUERADE. 163

fant, generously offered to bring me up as his own child, especially as he could do so without occasioning any suspicions, having been for some years settled in in this part of the country, at a considerable distance from my grandfather's habitation. In such a situation he could the better carry on so honest an imposition—to use my father's words—and give me a good chance for the possession of two family-estates instead of one, as he determined to make me *his* heir, in whatever manner my grandfather should be provoked to act, on discovering what had been so studiously concealed from him. —As my worthy uncle always treated me like his son, I loved him and revered him as my father: but whenever I spoke of Eudocia or you in terms of admiration, he told me that it was time enough for me to think of engaging myself.—I never made any reply to such answers till just before I left you last: I then mentioned you in a manner which shewed how sincerely I loved you; but I was commanded to be silent till

I re-

164 THE MASQUERADE.

I returned from Mr. Thompson's.—With *that* name my father came down to a little house about twenty miles off, to which I often went to visit him, as the nearest and dearest friend of him who is now my uncle.—The last time I found him in deep mourning. He received me with greater affection than ever.—Immediately observing that I was not so chearful as usual, he asked me the cause of the alteration in my appearance ; and asked me in a way which would not permit me to conceal my uneasiness from him, if I had intended to hide it.—I told him the cause of it at once, thinking to make him a serviceable friend in the management of an affair which I had so much at heart.—He, in return, cried, “ Let me first, my dearest Edmund, inform you how very near, as well as dear, you are to me ; and then tell me, if you think I can refuse you any thing you can ask, which may reasonably be granted by me.”—After a discovery, too affecting to be particularly related to my Alicia, while
she

THE MASQUERADE. 165

she is so depressed, I opened my whole heart to the most affectionate of fathers, who kindly told me, that he had been rendered too unhappy from an opposition to his own wishes, ever to make *me* miserable by thwarting mine; adding, that if the lady loved me as much as I did her, he would demand her of her father for me.— He did so; and I suppose, by what you tell me, this was a concerted scheme between our parents, to try how far I was agreeable to my dear Alicia; as my father, when he permitted me to leave him, bade me go and see my mistress, and return to him again when *she* could spare me. — And now, Alicia, will you — can you (added the dear youth with an anxious tenderness) send me back unhappy?”

The strongest words will but poorly describe what I felt, my sister, during my amiable Edmund's recital; but the conclusion of it took from me all power of speech; and I should have fallen senseless on the floor, had not he caught me in his arms.

When

166 THE MASQUERADE.

When I recovered, I could only by looks and sighs let him know to what a degree I was made happy by this proof of his love.

In a few days, Sir Edmund and Mr. Hastings, senior, came to see me, and both joined with my father in laughing at the fuss into which they had thrown me. Sir Edmund declared that the scheme was *his*, to try the strength of my affection for his son; as he should have been much concerned, he said, to have had his boy dispose of his heart, without receiving one in return.

I have hardly left room, my dear Olivia, to desire you to come down to us as soon as you can.—You may be assured, that no person can be so agreeable and so proper a companion for me at the approaching ceremony, as my sister: our dear Dossy will not, I dare say, refuse to part with you upon so interesting an occasion. Besides, change of air may be of great service to you, and your native air is the most likely, I think, to be salutary.

My

THE MASQUERADE. 167

My dear Edmund joins with my father and myself in begging you to come with all convenient expedition.

I need not desire you to communicate the contents of this to lady Avon; whose letter I will answer the very first opportunity.

LETTER

L E T T E R LVIII.

Sir CHARLES SEDLEY to Col. ACKWORTH.

THIS uncommon woman, this lady Avon, rises superior to all my evil machinations against her. I almost begin to despair of her; that is, of making her what I wish her to be; and have been, more than once, tempted to give her up—yet I must *then* quite lose my revenge both on *her* and Olivia.—That's hard—curfed hard—I don't expect, now, to conquer lady Avon; but to be refused by that little simple rustic, as I took her to be, that mere country girl—'Sdeath! how it galls me!—This Melville will never make any thing of it—We employed him only to counterfeit a passion, and he fell downright in love.—He has declared his sentiments, and ruined himself, as he says in a letter to Mrs. Minchin, full of the false sublime; and let me
perish

THE MASQUERADE. 169

perish if I would play so foolish a part for any woman under the sun: these fellows, with their whining nonsense, are always treated like puppies as they are. When a man once begins to be frightened at the sight of the woman he loves, 'tis all over with him.—Respect!—submission!—deference!—ridiculous stuff!—they only make a woman hold up her head higher than she did before. —No—no—ever keep them down, if you wish to be well with them.

What would I now give to see this haughty lady Avon, proud to a degree beyond expression,—only because she is virtuous, I suppose;—what would I not give to see her humbled?—But to be the cause of her humiliation, would be to triumph indeed.—

I have started a scheme. I am determined to come to the point with her. On one of the nights, when Avon stays late at Mrs. Minchin's, I will, somehow, contrive to get a sight, at least, of his wife in her

170 THE MASQUERADE.

most retired hours. If she will not, after all that I shall say to her; if she will not hear me, if she will not speak to me, why—I shall have the pleasure of seeing a fine woman go to bed—that's all.

LETTER

THE MASQUERADE. 171

LETTER LIX.

Lady AVON to Miss OLIVIA HEBER.

COME to me, my dear Olivia, as soon as possible after the receipt of this.— Come to me—I never wanted you so much. And to convince you of the necessity of your presence at this time, let me tell you why you receive so earnest an invitation from me, that you may have no excuse left.

Last night, my dear, I made several visits : having met with few people at home, I called in at Sir William's. I found my lady engaged with a private party at quadrille, and therefore, after a short stay, I took my leave.—I sat down to supper by myself.—My lord, on hearing that I designed to make visits, and finish the evening at my uncle's, went to the *usual place*.

As soon as I had supped, I went up to my dressing-room, and rang for Loyd.—

172 THE MASQUERADE.

Happening not to be at all sleepy, I had no mind to go to bed. However I undressed me; and after having chatted for some time with Loyd, for want of better company, sent her away, telling her, that I would ring for her when I was ready to go to bed.

I took up a book and began to read.

In a short time I heard a rap, and in a moment my lord came up stairs.

I was so pleased with him for coming home so much earlier than usual, so much sooner than I had expected him, that I ran to him to tell him how glad I was to see him, as I really wanted a little chat, having met with not one conversible creature during his absence from me. At my request, therefore, instead of leaving me to call Loyd, he sat down by me.

A noise, which we heard in the closet between the dressing-room and chamber, alarmed him: he rose immediately to go and see if any body was there: I, who was eagerly telling him something, cried, "No-body

THE MASQUERADE. 173

body but Loyd."—But he *would* go—(taking up the candle.)

In a moment almost I heard him say, "Villain, what business have you here?"

"Not so much a villain as yourself, my lord," was the reply; "as I have not so lovely a wife at home, to condemn me for the hours which I spend with my mistress."

I heard no more; but, running to the closet, saw Sedley and my lord both with their swords drawn.

I seized my lord, called to Sir Charles not to hurt him, and cried aloud for help. My fears, however, becoming too powerful for me, I fainted away.

On opening my eyes, I found myself in the arms of lord Melville. Lord Avon, standing by, looked at me with a kind of fullen gloom.—Sir Charles lay bleeding on the floor—all our servants were assembled round us.

For *my* part, I felt an instantaneous sensation of joy at the sight of my lord alive. Hastily disengaging myself from Melville,

174 THE MASQUERADE.

and advancing to my dear Harry, I said eagerly, "Thank Heaven! you are not hurt."

"Not hurt?" replied he—"Oh! deeply, deeply—*My* peace and *your* reputation are destroyed—but this is not a time for talking—You have undone us both for ever—yet surely *one* man at a time was enough!—Oh! woman, woman!" continued he, throwing himself into a chair.

I was now as much astonished as I had been frightened.

Melville, who had been looking at Sir Charles, said to lord Avon, "There is no time to be lost, my lord: I fear he is dead: you have nothing to do but to escape directly: I will take the same care of my lady as you would yourself."

"No doubt, Sir," replied lord Avon, (with an indifference which at once amazed and pained me) "but as much as I despise her for making such a dupe of me, I shall not leave her under *your* protection."

"Send

THE MASQUERADE. 175

“ Send for her relations and friends, then,” said lord Melville, “ and I will quit your house directly : but, tho’ you suspect me very unjustly, for your innocent, your injured lady’s sake, have some regard to your own preservation : a surgeon must come to Sir Charles ; let me prevail on you to go off first.”

“ Do, do, my dear Harry,” said I, with my eyes full of tears : “ I will go with you.”

“ Fetch Mountney immediately, and a surgeon,” was all his reply.

When lord Melville, after having again offered his assistance to us both, had left us, I asked my lord how all this happened, and why he looked so discontented at me.

“ Can you possibly ask ?” replied he, with a tremulous voice ; “ has not my life been endangered on *your* account ? one would have thought that a single lover at a time was sufficient, but two at once—Oh ! Eudocia !”

“ By all that’s good, my lord,” said I, “ I was as ignorant of their being here as you was : but if you have really killed Sir Charles, do not stay here ; let us away immediately ? you will bye and bye be convinced that I am more to be pitied than blamed.”

During my endeavours to remove my lord’s suspicions, Bingley, who had been trying to stop the blood streaming from Sir Charles’s side, advanced, and with all the humility and respect becoming a man in his station, yet with all the honest warmth of an old servant who had a real regard for his master, intreated my lord not to risque his safety by staying any longer.

“ And what signifies my safety ?” replied he fiercely, “ when she whom I love more than life has deceived me.”

“ Never, my lord,” cried I.

At that moment Mr. Mountney entered the room.

Astonished at the dreadful scene before him, he, however, quickly comprehended the

THE MASQUERADE. 177

the meaning of it; and, on the surgeon's being upon the stairs, he hurried my lord and me into another room.

On my lord's owning that he had killed Sedley, with whom he believed I had an appointment, and had put him into the closet; as he came home sooner than usual, Mountney looked at me, and then so strenuously insisted upon my lord's setting off, that moment, for France, that he no longer refused.

I then interposed, and assured Mr. Mountney that I was perfectly innocent, desiring to go with my lord.

"You cannot go with him," said he, "because you cannot travel post; but you shall go after him when you are able. At present compose yourself as well as you can: I will just see my lord safe on his way, and return to you, and conduct you to Sir William Tameworth's."

Having so spoken, he looked at my lord as if for his approbation, who, however, made no answer: but, on Mountney's say-

178 THE MASQUERADE.

ing to him, "Come, I can allow you only a moment to take leave;" I approached to throw my arms round his neck, and to beg him to take care of himself.

He turned short from me, and left me to my sorrow, without offering to comfort me by one word, by a single look.

A shower of tears relieved me, while Loyd, who appeared to be little less concerned than myself, persuaded me to be immediately blooded; but I listened to nothing which she proposed, and sat, endeavouring by reflection to account for all the confusion which had happened.

I asked Loyd again and again, if she actually knew, or could guess, how Sir Charles got into my closet.

She declared her ignorance in such pitying terms, and seemed to be so sincerely affected with my distress, that I could not disbelieve her.

Before Mountney returned, the surgeon had taken care, with the assistance of the servants, to remove Sir Charles, of whose
life

THE MASQUERADE. 179

life he declared he had very slight hopes, as he had received two dangerous wounds, one in the side, and the other near the hip, and was entirely insensible from loss of blood.

I trembled at this account for my Avon's safety.

In that situation Mountney found me at his return, and told me that he had not only seen my lord on his way to Dover, but had prepared lady Tameworth to receive me, and advised me to be carried to Sir William's in my chair directly.

I complied with his admonition, as my spirits began to sink.—I still, however, assured Mountney in the strongest terms, that I was innocent.

“I dare say you are,” replied he; “and I hope we shall be able, in time, to make my lord sensible that you are.—As soon as you get to Sir William's, continued he, be put to bed and blooded, and I will see you again in the morning: but say as little as possible to lady Tameworth about this affair,

180 THE MASQUERADE.

fair,—(she is an arrant gossip)—and I will undertake to undeceive my lord.”

With these words he put me into my chair, and walked by the side of it to Sir William's.—I met with the kindest, the tenderest treatment; but not being able to get any sleep, and being particularly desirous of having you with me, I bade Loyd send for my writing-box; and as she so very earnestly persuaded me not to leave my bed, I sat up in it to write this, believing that the description of my situation would be an inducement to you to come, not to be resisted.

LETTER

I
yo
for
dar
wo
be
sen
spe
self
fir
tha
hop
and
at l
my
fanc
and

THE MASQUERADE. 181

LETTER LX.

Mr. MOUNTNEY to Lord AVON.

I HAVE waited, my lord, in hopes of sending some satisfactory intelligence to you : and it is with pleasure that I now inform you of Sedley's life being out of danger, from *your* hand at least : tho' he is wounded in such a way, that he will never be the man he was before.—As soon as his senses returned, and when he was able to speak, he sent for lord Melville and myself ; and declared, that having, from the first sight of lady Avon, admired her more than any woman he had ever seen, he hoped, from her youth and inexperience, and his own seducing powers, to make her at least sensible of his passion. — “ During my infamous endeavours, continued he, I fancied that Miss Heber did not dislike me, and conceived it possible, by making my ad-

182 THE MASQUERADE.

addresses to *her*, to gain time, and to meet with opportunities to render lady Avon subservient to my wishes. Finding, however, all my efforts ineffectual; finding myself at last refused by Miss Heber, I began, I own, to grow desperate. Lord Avon's attachment to Mrs. Minchin, just at that juncture, inspiring me with new hopes, I commenced an acquaintance with her; and as it was her interest also to provide my lady with a lover, that she might secure him to herself more firmly, by strengthening his suspicions harboured against his wife; she fixed upon lord Melville as a very amiable man, and as a man whom she imagined more likely to succeed in his designs on lady Avon; but when he met with a repulse, I resolved to get into the house, on one of those nights when he staid at Mrs. Minchin's. I concealed myself, by bribing a house-maid, in a closet near my lady's chamber; proposing to remain secreted till she was a-bed: to come out then, and by fine speeches in praise of her,

ac-

THE MASQUERADE. 183

accompanied with invectives against his lordship and Mrs. Minchin, to try to move her in my favour. My intention was, in case of being unsuccessful by fair means, to convince her ladyship how much her reputation would be aspersed, when it was known that I had been with her in her bed-chamber.—Many women have sacrificed their virtue to their reputation; and I flattered myself that lady Avon would prove one of them.—Before I had time, however, to play off the second part of my scheme, my lord came home. — Finding I should have no opportunity to pursue my intentions *that* night, I tried to slip away; but happening to run against something, which fell down, he came in and discovered me before I could escape. High words immediately rose between us: we both drew, and I, having received two large wounds, fell, and soon became insensible thro' loss of blood.

“ And now, my lord,” continued he, turning to lord Melville, “ it only remains
for

184 THE MASQUERADE.

for us to know how your lordship came to be found also in lord Avon's house at that time of night?"

"I hope, Sir, replied his lordship, that I can account for my sudden appearance there in a very satisfactory manner. That I admired lady Avon I am not ashamed to own; but I am ashamed to confess, that I took advantage of a piece of service I did her, to make her acquainted with my sentiments; but yet, as the dishonour of such a proceeding falls only upon myself, I do not repent of it; for the repulse her ladyship gave me has so exceedingly raised her in my opinion, that I look upon her as superior to any woman I ever knew; and I revere her virtue as much as I admire her sense and beauty.—I never repeated my visits after her express prohibition,—but I could not tear her lovely image from my heart—I could not cease to adore what was so worthy of adoration; nor to wish and pray, continually, for her never-ending felicity.—With these sentiments, then,

was

THE MASQUERADE. 185

was it possible for me to hear of any designs against her honour and her peace, without wishing to save her? I was not, indeed, exactly acquainted with your intentions, Sir Charles, but I knew they were bad, from what Mrs. Minchin had dropped: and as I knew you went *from* her that day, with a design to go to lord Avon's, as soon as lord Avon was *with* her, I watched you, and saw you admitted, with an air of privacy, by a servant, at a late hour, when my lord was from home. Knowing that my lady's dressing-room looked upon an opening, from whence I could hear any bustle in her apartment, I walked up and down near her window. At last, hearing a scream, and imagining that she herself was in danger, I ran into the house, hurried up stairs and came just time enough to prevent her falling to the floor. My behaviour was, I confess, sufficient to create suspicions in my lord; I am, therefore, particularly happy in having this opportunity to clear myself, Sir, to you—(addressing

186 THE MASQUERADE.

sing himself to *me*) but still more so in vindicating the most amiable and virtuous of wives, who will, I hope, by your representing this affair to my lord in its true light, be restored to his lordship's highest opinion, and tenderest affection."

And now, my lord, I must relate the situation and sentiments of lady Avon. Till the servant who attended you brought word back that you were safely arrived at Calais, she appeared to be in a very anxious state of mind about you: but after that intelligence, there was a steady calmness in her appearance, which would have sufficiently evinced her innocence, had it not been soon confirmed from the lips of Sir Charles and lord Melville. You may thank Heaven, my lord, that your Eudocia has so excellent a constitution, and such a flow of spirits, which have enabled her to support herself under trials, by which many, by which, indeed, most women would have been overwhelmed. Your behaviour to her before you went, and your neglecting to
send

THE MASQUERADE. 187

send a line back by the servant, have, I believe, touched her deeply :— She is, 'tis true, in much better health than could be expected, all things considered; but I cannot tell how you will bring her to a reconciliation with you, as she told me, no longer ago than yesterday, that a woman was never safe with a man so subject to jealousy.

As soon as she heard that Sir Charles was out of danger, she returned to Grosvenor-square with Olivia, who immediately came from Richmond, and remained with her at Sir William's till her removal. — That poor dear girl could not help letting fall a few tears when she first heard of Sir Charles's dangerous situation : and when lady Avon cried, " Fye, Olivia, Can you be sorry for a wretch so unworthy of living?" answered, in the most amiable manner, " I do not weep for the man, my dear lady Avon, but for his vices." —

Olivia has, certainly, an excellent heart. I do not yet quite despair of making some
im-

188 THE MASQUERADE.

impression upon it. She receives all my attentions to amuse and divert her, not only with politeness, but with a complacency which is extremely pleasing: nay, she does not scruple to praise me for my solicitude about her dear lady Avon's interest.

The late disagreeable event seems to have strengthened the friendship which has so long subsisted between these amiable women, who spend their time together, chiefly with their books and their musick—They admit but few visitors, except your and lady Avon's relations, and myself.

I have not yet ventured to ask Olivia's permission to write to Mr. Heber. The fear of a refusal keeps me silent. Besides, I am willing to see you once more reconciled to my lady first, if a friendly interview can be brought about. She has, undoubtedly, a noble soul—Never has she dropped a syllable relating to your affair with Mrs. Minchin, who has neither sent nor called. It is said that she is gone in-

to

THE MASQUERADE. 189

to the country. She will act wisely, indeed, not to make her appearance again, as she cannot but appear to the greatest disadvantage; nor to say, in the most infamous light.

If any thing should retard your setting out for England, I shall, I suppose, have an answer to this:—but I shall be more pleased to see yourself than a letter from you.

LETTER

LETTER LXI.

Lord AVON to Mr. MOUNTNEY.

NEVER, surely, was any man more wretched than I am.—You expect me, I know, to rejoice with you upon Sedley's being out of danger; more especially on my wife's being safe and well, as my mind has been racked on her account, because every thing was to be apprehended from such an alarm in her situation: all-gracious Heaven be praised that she has received no fatal shock in so critical a condition.—That is the only satisfaction I am capable of tasting.—I know, upon reflection, that she is certainly innocent.—I am pleased to find that I have not been accessary to the death of a man who, I am now assured, thanks to my excellent Eudocia, could not injure me; but I feel the greatest relief, weighed down as I am with shame and re-

THE MASQUERADE. 191

morse for having so unjustly accused, and so inhumanly treated her, from the information which you give me concerning her health and the state of her mind. Had she fallen a victim, as I at first feared she would, from her surprize and terror, to my precipitate carriage, I should not have survived her: and even as things are now circumstanced, while she is thus, with reason, incensed against me, and fearful of trusting herself with me, I will remain at a distance; tho' I would, at this instant, give my eyes for *one* look at her, and my life to snatch *one* dear embrace. Till she can, therefore, bring herself to look upon me in the light she first beheld me, (perhaps you and she both think, and perhaps justly too, that in the same light I deserve not to be viewed) I will never return. I cannot bear the thoughts of a cool reception from the woman on whom my soul doats,—my life, my all, my more-than-ever-beloved Eudocia.

Shew

192 THE MASQUERADE.

Shew this letter to her—'tis not, indeed, fit for her to see ; but I cannot write a better one :—My mind is quite unhinged.—I began to write two or three letters to her, but they would not do. My expressions did not come up to my ideas of her excellence. She is all virtue. How could I, my sweet, my innocent, my angelic creature, harbour an evil thought of one so perfectly pure, so exemplarily good!—Shew this to her, I say, Mountney ; but do not let her believe—as she did once—that I am mad.

Just when I was going to dispatch this, I was informed, that a lady, arrived from England, desired to speak with me.

H—ns ! how my heart fluttered ! — I imagined—no—I could not expect such a favour—yet I *did* expect to see my Eudocia—I knew she was kind ; I knew she was forgiving. I fancied, at first, that her humanity might have induced her to visit an unfortunate wretch, banished from her presence and her heart.

Who

THE MASQUERADE. 193

Who should come in but Mrs. Minchin? Curse on the name, and her that bears it, the source of all my sorrows!—Yet I should rather curse myself for beginning to give her hopes of succeeding with me.—Had I not been prompted by a most absurd desire to make my wife jealous, this my plague and I had never met.

I turned my back, and clapped my hand up hastily to my eyes that I might not see her; but she hung upon me in such a manner, that I was obliged to make a violent effort to disengage myself—In so doing I saw her crawling after me on the ground.

With her eyes bathed in tears, she said eagerly, “Oh! forgive me: I dare not ask for your love: you cannot, I fear, either love or pity me, tho’ there never was a human creature who wanted your compassion more.—’Tis godlike, however, to be merciful—Even those who have sinned against Heaven itself, are not entirely excluded from the throne of grace.”

VOL. II.

K

I could

194 THE MASQUERADE.

I could not bear to hear such a wretch talk in this strain: I broke rudely from her.

She fell on the floor with a shriek; at my inhumanity, I suppose.—But have I not been inhuman to my wife, to my angel? and can she, this Harriot, presume to murmur?"

I left her, therefore, and ran out of the house—The officious mistress of the *hotel* followed me, begging me to return, as the lady was in strong fits; adding, that she could not answer for her life, if I would not come back, and assist her.

I made no answer; but quickened my pace till I got out of her sight; took other lodgings, and sent my man, who had followed me, for my things, bidding him tell Mrs. Minchin, if she made any enquiries after me, that I had ordered him to say that I would never see her again.

He returned in about an hour, and told me that she had been put to bed, extremely ill,

THE MASQUERADE. 195

ill, after having declared that she should not live if I could not be prevailed on to come and see her.

I peremptorily refused to go to her; nor could they persuade me, by repeated messages, to alter my resolution; tho' they informed me that she was in a violent fever, and threatened to destroy herself if I denied her request.

You may imagine, that tho' I despised Mrs. Minchin, I could not be unaffected with this account of her situation—(Yet—my G—d! why should I, so despicable a mortal, who am fallen so very low, why should I, of all people, despise any person, especially a poor weak woman, whose faults and follies sprung chiefly from her too great partiality to me!)—But when I reflected on the mischief she had levelled against my dear wife, my heart hardened again—I kept my resolution, and sent to secure my passage on board the first packet which sailed for England.

196 THE MASQUERADE.

When I arrive—(and happy shall I be if I ever arrive) in England, I shall not dare, however, to rush, undesired, into the presence of my wife—I was going, mistaken, fond fool as I am, I was going, I say, to call her my Eudocia—but that's too much—she will most probably never be mine—I cannot see her till she chuses I should appear before her;—and if she never chuses to see me, I must submit.—My head is exceedingly out of order. I was going to call Bingley, who is just come to me, and who runs out into the most extravagant encomiums on his angel of a lady, as he calls her—(poor fellow, he has lived with me from his infancy; he knows that he cannot please me more effectually, than by respecting my wife)—I was going, I say, to bid him tell the master of the vessel that I had changed my mind.—Yet do not you, nor let my wife, mistake me, Mountney, and suppose that I staid on Harriot's account.—Nothing should have bribed me to see her;
but

THE MASQUERADE. 197

but I felt myself all over ill—Yet I may be sick or well—no matter what becomes of me.

If I land safe, I shall go to Richmond : I shall not be able to meet Eudocia till she thinks she can forgive me—and if she absolutely steels her heart against me, I will come hither again, or convey myself to some other country.—I will not go, however, on any account, to Mrs. Minchin, who is given over. If she dies, may Heaven forgive her as I do, tho' she has totally destroyed my peace.

K 3

LETTER

198 THE MASQUERADE.

LETTER LXII.

Mr. MOUNTNEY to Lord AVON.

THIS waits your landing at Dover :
You may come to Richmond ; my lady and Miss Heber are in town : they only spend a day at Richmond, now and then, for the benefit of the air, which has proved very serviceable to Olivia.

Sir William, lady Tameworth, or general Brett, have hitherto been of our parties, neither of whom hinders me from being attentive to Olivia ; who owned, yesterday, in the garden, while I obliged her to lean on my arm, as she was extremely weak and low, that she had a very high esteem for me : — “ But in whom, Mr. Mountney, continued she, blushing, can I, after what I have seen and heard, place any confidence ? ”

“ In

THE MASQUERADE. 199

“ In *me* you may safely confide, my dear Miss Heber, said I ; but try me first, only suffer me to love you, and to shew that I do, and will consent to your not returning it till your own inclination prompts you to make me so happy, or till you think I deserve such happiness.”

She returned no verbal answer : a rosy blush was her reply ; nor did she make any opposition to a tender kiss which I imprinted on her pretty white hand, which I held in mine during our walk.

I have discovered, by my visits to Sedley since his confinement, that he has punctually corresponded with Ackworth all along ; and wrote to *him*, who is at Bath, to accuse him of having concealed Sedley's designs against you, at the same time that he professed a great esteem for you, and a strong desire to hear of your happiness.

In answer to that charge, he assures me, that having been long acquainted with Sedley's volatile temper, he never imagined he had any serious intentions of any kind ;

200 THE MASQUERADE.

and that had he really believed them to have been of so pernicious a nature, he should not only have reproved him, (as he had often taken him to task for some of his rogueries, which were likely to be attended with disagreeable consequences) but have acquainted *me* also with his designs.

Of this apology for his conduct I am to believe as much as I think proper; yet I don't imagine that George has ever been in the least accessory to the follies of his friend: he has only remained neuter, and suffered him to play the devil unmolested. Ackworth is, according to the language of the world, an easy good natured man; but certainly good nature may be carried so far as to degenerate into downright insensibility.—Not to stop a madman in the pursuit of his destructive frolicks, is surely to be destitute of feeling or spirit.—However, I have made Ackworth sensible of his error, and desire once more to bring you together upon a friendly footing. I shall,

THE MASQUERADE. 201

shall, therefore, let him know when you are in a state tranquil enough to receive his renewed overtures.

Sedley, whom I see now and then, talks of going to the waters of Bareges as soon as he is able to travel; and Melville vows never more to come into lady Avon's company, not even within sight of her, if he can possibly avoid her. Having, therefore, no formidable rivals to fear, you may come and peaceably recover the possession of your Eudocia's heart: that is, if she can bring herself to receive you again; and much may be hoped from the excellence of her disposition.

I shall call on you, when you are arrived at Richmond, but shall not remain with you there till you are in a more settled situation.—Write to me, then, as usual: as I shall to you from London.

LETTER LXIII.

MISS OLIVIA HEBER TO MISS HEBER.

AFTER having received so many letters,* filled with disagreeable accounts from me, my dear Alicia, you will, now, I dare say, be glad to hear that lord Avon is at Richmond.—Mr. Mountney has been with him a day and a night. He has told my lady, that he hardly knew him at first, so pale, so emaciated, so worn—as he expressed it—with pining discontent. Not that he has had any illness; but a diseased mind is sufficient to produce in any person the alteration like that visible in his lordship.

Our dear Doffy wept while Mr. Mountney described my lord's distressful appearance—Compassion moved; love melted her.

* These letters are omitted, as unnecessary.

“ I will

THE MASQUERADE. 203

“ I will go to him, Mr. Mountney, said she : I *must* see him.”

“ Have patience, replied he ; let me”—

“ I can have no patience, interrupted she, while my dear Harry is so wretched.”

“ But you *must* stay and hear what I have to say, answered he. — Mrs. Minchin is dead. While my lord waited at Dover for the horses being put to the chaise, a boat arrived with one of her servants on board, who was dispatched to inform her family of her death. I asked my lord after the particulars, but he said he did not make any enquiries about them. “ Let her for ever, cried he, with her follies, be buried in oblivion : I have enough to do to correct my own : I can only talk of my wronged Eudocia, whom I so eagerly wish to see, but whom I so much dread to behold.”

Our dear lady Avon would have set out immediately, but Mr. Mountney desired her to stay till the following day ; telling her, that it was too late for only two or three women to go by themselves ; and as

204 THE MASQUERADE.

he was engaged in town, he could not possibly attend her : tho', as he staid with us during the remainder of the evening, I imagined he had a particular reason for his behaviour.

She rose up to retire after supper, and I was going to follow her—He caught me by the hand, and begged me to stay half an hour longer.

I complied, thro' inclination indeed, and because I never know how to refuse him any reasonable request, as he is always so obliging to me. But I was now quite staggered how to answer him, when he very seriously intreated me to give him leave to write to my father. I am sure I looked exceedingly silly ; nor could I make him any kind of reply for a considerable time.

On his eagerly importuning me to speak, and imagining that lady Avon would be surpris'd at my staying so long below after her, I told him, at last, that my sentiments with regard to him were not changed ; that I had an esteem for him on account of his
OWN

THE MASQUERADE. 205

own merit, and for his unalterable friendship for lady Avon; but that I had never thought of him in any other light.

“ And is it then impossible, said he, for that dear innocent heart to feel nothing but esteem ! Only tell me, Miss Heber, if you have any violent objection to my asking your father’s consent to make you mine by the strictest ties of love and honour. Time, perhaps, and my unchanging affection, may produce similar sensations on your side.”

I really was quite sorry to find him so urgent : I had rather not think of marriage yet a while.

At last I told him so—He seemed disappointed, and left me ; saying, however, before he went, that he thought my lady appeared too much affected to go to Richmond so late in the evening : but added, that he should not oppose her going in the morning.

When I went up to my lady, I acquainted her with what had passed ; and she chid me for not giving Mountney a more favourable

206 THE MASQUERADE.

yourable answer : telling me, that I might live to be a hundred, and never meet with a man so worthy, and so suitable to me.—

“ Therefore, continued she, as you don’t, certainly, design always to live single, why will you refuse to make him happy ?”

At first I was a little capricious, I am afraid ; but upon her talking to me more earnestly, I promised to follow her advice if ever Mountney renewed the subject.

“ ’Tis very possible, said she, in her lively way, that you have heard and seen him for the last time. Men of sense, my dear, don’t like to be trifled with.”

“ But as I have not intended to trifle with him, said I, he cannot be angry for nothing. Besides, he *must* come to see you and my lord, and I am not going to leave you.”

“ Poor dear child, replied she, laughing, she is quite afraid of losing her love — But come, Olly, added she, let us undress, and I will see what I can do for you in the morning.” Then, after having begged her

not

THE MASQUERADE. 207

not to take notice to Mr. Mountney about what I had said, I turned the conversation to a subject more interesting to her.

[Thus far I wrote before Mr. Mountney came to breakfast.]

As I was dressed first, I came down to him. — He received me with his usual politeness, but looked extremely serious.

Dossy, soon afterwards, came flying into the room with a giddy air,—nothing can tame her—and said, “This poor thing, Mr. Mountney, has been fretting all night, because she has taken it into her head that your angry with her.

“Dear lady Avon!”—said I, laying my hand upon her mouth,——“I really do not comprehend your ladyship’s meaning,” replied he, very gravely, “I have no right to be offended with Miss Olivia.”

“How stupid men are at particular times, said she, What can I mean by that?”—

“Oh! hold—stop—dear, dear Eudocia,” cried I——

208 THE MASQUERADE.

Mountney now began to have some suspicions ; for, with a half smile, he caught me from my friend, and looking kindly in my face, said, “ And what is all this bustle about? Have I any share in it, Miss Heber?”

I coloured, and trembled to such a degree, Alicia, that I thought I never should have recovered myself.

The sprightly lady Avon then cried, “ There—take her—take her, Mr. Mountney, I am sure if she does not love you just now, she will bye and bye.”

Imagine whether this at all tended to bring me to myself—However, there is no being angry with her ; and her spirits are so raised by my lord’s return—

Mr. Mountney said a great many handsome things to us both—and very much lamented his being unable to attend us to Richmond.

The coach is now at the door. Adieu.

LETTER

THE 'MASQUERADE. 209

LETTER LXIV.

Lord AVON to Mr. MOUNTNEY.

WHAT transporting happiness am I now, my dear Mountney, going to enjoy, if I have but discretion enough to make the remembrance of my past follies deter me from plunging into new ones!

When you left me yesterday, I was in such a fit of despair, that I began to think I had not the slightest expectation of a more tranquil state; knowing to how great a degree I had offended my excellent wife, and very rationally believing that she might never be able, if inclined, to conquer so just a resentment—yet sighing, trembling, wishing for a reconciliation.—What a condition!—Was not this sufficient to disquiet a mind much more at ease than mine has been for a long time.

You

210 THE MASQUERADE.

You gave me some distant hopes of my Eudocia's pardon ; but I did not, I own, dare to flatter myself with having a sight of her so soon.

While I was in this desponding situation, Bingley hurried after me into the garden, and told me that my lady was come.

I declare positively, I hardly credited his intelligence ; believing that the poor, faithful fellow had only spoke according to his wishes, and was not the actual messenger of such animating news.

I therefore followed him very slowly, still demanding what he meant.

Rubbing his hands for joy, he cried, " Indeed, my lord, 'tis true—my lady is come—she is here," continued he, respectfully passing my angel, whom I indeed beheld.

H—ns ! how my swelling bosom throbbed with rapture at the sight of her ! With what an elegant dignity she advanced ! What a spirited glow was spread over her
lovely

THE MASQUERADE. 211

lovely face! How her charming eyes, while they sparkled like fire, beamed tenderness inexpressible! I felt my heart sink within me—I shook with a thousand apprehensions—yet, tho' I trembled to meet her, I died to be locked in her arms.—Then, considering how undeserving I was, how little I merited such a blessing, I turned away from her in absolute despair. Recollecting, at length, that I still ought to implore her pardon, however hopeless of obtaining it, I went immediately to throw myself at her feet.

She prevented me by running into my arms.

Imagine my sensations—I could not speak—I could only strain her to my beating bosom, while I wept aloud upon her neck.

For a considerable time we remained in this situation—mute from the violence of our emotions.

My Eudocia, recovering first, begged me, with a tender pity which made her appear

212 THE MASQUERADE.

pear more than human in my eyes, to be calm—to be composed. “Let all be now forgotten, my lord,” said she, “that has given us a moment’s uneasiness; and let us, from this hour, endeavour to make each other perfectly happy—You are restored to my arms; to my heart: you are dearer to me than ever; and I will from this day forward be the sort of wife you please to have me.”

“And can I hear this and be composed, my life, my all that’s good and dear to me?” cried I, embracing her with the most impassioned tenderness.—“Can it be possible not to adore such angelic sweetness?—Oh! Eudocia! how little have I deserved this amiable condescension!”

The lovely creature returned my endearments with an affectionate ardor which I had never been blest with before; and, at the same time, kindly insisted on my never thinking again on what was past—while I gave myself up to transports till then unknown. Yet I could not shake off a de-
jection

THE MASQUERADE. 213

jection which hung upon my mind, on reflecting upon my past follies.—My Eudocia observing it, proposed to me to go into the house, and to see Olivia, who has, she tells me, consented to make you happy—with such wives, my friend, we cannot be otherwise—yet *your* felicity will be more pure than mine, because it will be unembittered by remorse.

My self-reproaches prevented me from eating at dinner.—Had I not been so prevented, the raptures I felt on seeing and hearing her, who is my soul's supreme joy, would have almost deprived me of my senses.—With what tender care did she endeavour to help me to whatever she knew I used to be fond of; and how many agreeable schemes did she form for little rural excursions, for the recovery of my health, and the amusement of my mind!

“ You are so pale and thin, my Harry,” said the dear creature, “ that I must have something done for you : tho’ I love you the better for looking so just now, because
I know

214 THE MASQUERADE.

I know I have been the cause of your anxiety—but it has worn you too much.”

I declared to her, that she was a thousand times more beautiful than ever.

“Don’t you, then, reproach yourself while you say so?” replied she, with a tender smile—“But I have, indeed, felt for you greatly: only my excessive spirits supported me under things that would have hurt some people prodigiously.”

“Your innocence, my love,” said I, “was a never-failing support: you have always been blest with a consciousness of rising superior to every injurious suspicion, while *my* guilt ever sunk me deeper and deeper.”

“No more of that,” cried she, putting her hand upon my lips, “if you love me,” while I almost devoured her charming fingers.

We spent the day in the most delightful endearments; and I could hardly tear myself from her to write to you.

She

THE MASQUERADE. 215

She has just now proposed to me to go down to my house in Devonshire for the summer: but I cannot think of *that* journey at present.—She bids me tell you that Olivia wants you to come and trifle with her, as she sits mooping in a corner by herself. — The gentle Olivia, blushing, cries. “ Fye, my dear lady Avon.”—Yet I will venture to say, that she will not be sorry to see you.—My dear girl, who is now leaning over my shoulder, tells her what I have written, and she threatens me with her pretty eyes: my lively angel, at the same time, says that she will not have me chidden till I have better health and spirits to support such an attack.

Come then, my dear Mountney, and increase the happiness of your happy

A V O N.

P. S. I HAVE considered that, were it not for my Eudocia's situation, which makes me chuse to have her in or very near London, it may be also injurious to
her

216 THE MASQUERADE.

her character to carry her into Devonshire just at this time, as the tattling world have made themselves so busy about our affairs. — No — let us, on the contrary, appear every where in public together; and by our lives contradict the most insidious calumnies, and consequently silence them. — I am now perfectly convinced, that a woman of sense and virtue may be trusted even in the worst company; and that I alone have been to blame, with regard to lady Avon, from the beginning, from the first setting out in the marriage-state. After I had, as she once justly reproached me, taken her from her friends, I had no right to find fault with her innocent gaiety, while she gave me no reason to doubt her honour. — But I hope and believe 'tis all over now for ever: of this I am certain, she never discovered so much enchanting tenderness as she did last night. — I have only to wish, that her tenderness may be as lasting as it is certainly, to all appearance, sincere.

F I N I S.